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West Indies Blues: an historical overview 1920s-1950s **— blues and music from the English-speaking West Indies**

by John Cowley

In most contemporary literature, a direct relationship between black music from the English-speaking West Indies and the United States is considered a twentieth-century development. Generally, Jamaica is given as the prime example of interchange, but in the region's history the popularity of Jamaican styles is a relatively recent occurrence.

Cultural Connections of Long Standing

Before slavery was abolished in the United States, black people in the British West Indies were perceived as brothers in blood in the fight for Emancipation. The ending of Apprenticeship in Britain's colonies (1 August 1838) was cause for annual celebration by enslaved black people in the South, until freedom was achieved at the end of the Civil War.¹ Cultural influences moved in both directions. For example, George Liele, a famous black American slave preacher from the southern states, was instrumental in establishing a mission in Jamaica. By the early 1800s his Baptist church had tentacles that stretched from black Christian converts in the United States, to Jamaica, Canada, Britain, and ultimately Sierra Leone in Africa.² In Trinidad (1,000 miles south of Jamaica), one early North American connection was the Company Villages, where the administration settled black troops who had fought on the side of the British in the War of 1812-14 with the U.S.³

In addition to trade, there were many other cultural contacts between the United States and West Indian islands from their earliest settlement by Europeans. These ranged from tours by U.S. theatrical companies and circuses to the medicine shows that provided such a rich training ground for black songsters in North America. The skilled black fiddle player was just as sought after by the plantocracy of West Indian islands as he was by its equivalent in the South. In both instances, he was employed to play the European recreational dances that swept across the Atlantic in fashion after fashion throughout the century, but were later reciprocated by novel American styles. Similar general trends in musical evolution also applied. Jubilee and black-in-black-face minstrelsy laid the foundation stones for the acceptance of later forms of black North American music, and this was also the case in Africa, Europe, and the Antipodes. Obeah and other forms of magic (or 'science' in local parlance) were reinforced by the same publications that black Americans purchased in the United States. There are many other links and parallels that intertwine across the nineteenth century.⁴

West Indian Migration to the U.S.A.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the United States was viewed as a likely place for migration by aspirant black West Indians. From the early 1900s to the advent of restrictive legislation in 1924 — and even afterwards until 1952, whilst they were still counted as British nationals — the primary external focal point for black migration from Britain's then West Indian colonies remained the United States of America.⁵

Documentary evidence for this early- to mid-twentieth century period of emigration is especially hard to uncover. Some migration was seasonal, and revolved around the agricultural cycle. For example, after his success as a blues singer, Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup was employed as an overseer for gangs of West Indian transients who worked the crops north from Florida each season, before returning to their islands of origin.⁶ There was, of course, similar regional migration both between islands and also to and from the South American mainland. The Panama Canal was built using migrant labor from territories such as Barbados and Trinidad, but primarily Jamaica.⁷ Jamaicans travelled to Cuba to cut sugar in the 1920s and 1930s and Laurel Aitken, one of the principal Jamaican calypso / r'n'b / ska performers of the late 1950s and early 1960s, has maternal Cuban ancestry.⁸ Before the Second World War, the British journalist William Makin remembered seeing an itinerant blues pianist in Panama City who travelled from North America seeking employment wherever he went, just as others did throughout the South.⁹

A study by Ira De A. Reid shows that between 1899 and 1937 the majority of black West Indian migrants to the United States were from British territories. Their occupations on arrival were split between 'male industrial workers and female domestics,' likewise the main occupations for urban black people born in the United States. These job opportunities correspond with similar means of employment in the migrants' islands of origin, but as a whole there was a high proportion of skilled artisans and professionals who sought work in the new environment. They also brought their island folklore with them. For example, as early as 1919, Elsie Clews Parsons printed a 'West Indian Tale'

she had collected in New York City from a Trinidadian migrant named Charles Penny — 'Little girl, Mama Glau, and Hummingbird'.¹⁰

The concentration of black West Indian migrants in U.S. conurbations is highlighted in Reid's survey of the characteristics of this group. Thus, in 1930, 'there were 91,677 foreign-born Negroes residing in urban areas, 93 per cent of the total foreign-born Negro population,' the leading settlements being Boston, Cambridge, New York and Miami.¹¹ Pinpointed by Gilbert Osofsky, the most important of these locations was New York City where, during the 1920s, 'there were ten times as many foreign-born Negroes ... as in any other urban area' and in the same period 'about 25 per cent of Harlem's population was foreign born.'¹² Writing in 1928, Wallace Thurman pointed to the difficulty that followed this influx, noting how 'the Negro from the British West Indies...creates and has to face a disagreeable problem. Being the second largest Negro Group in Harlem, and being less susceptible to American manners and customs than others, he is frowned upon and berated by the American Negro.'¹³ This friction was to be reflected in local black music.

Entertainers

As this metropolis was a prime centre for musical and theatrical activity, it was inevitable that some West Indian entertainers would try their luck with the city's wider audience. A prototype for success was the famous black vaudeville singer-comedian Bert Williams. Although his minstrel-show training was U.S. based, he was born in Nassau, New Providence Island, Bahamas in 1874, but migrated with his family to Riverside, California, in 1885.¹⁴

During the 1920s, Trinidadians were in the forefront of black entertainers who moved to the United States from the British West Indies. They were undoubtedly encouraged by the success of Lovey's Trinidad String Band, which had toured the country in 1912, making records in New York City for both the Victor Talking Machine Company and Columbia Phonograph Company. Representatives of the Victor organisation visited the island in 1914 to record local music, including calypso. Leading his string band, the pianist Lionel 'Lanky' Belasco performed numerous pieces before the recording horn. He also cut four piano solos, and his unissued versions of *The Junk Man* – Rag, by Lucky Roberts, and Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* might be the earliest examples on gramophone record of these African-American compositions by any pianist.¹⁵ Belasco settled in New York by 1915, and for the next thirty-five years his recording career is associated with virtually all the Trinidad entertainers who made the same migration.

Lionel Belasco is a good example of a black West Indian expatriate who was a 'professional'. His father was of Sephardic descent and his mother a Barbadian creole. Both were musical, and their son inherited this talent.¹⁶ Born *circa* October 1887, by the early 1900s Belasco was running a small string band in Trinidad. His 1914 string-band recordings mix dreamy Spanish-American influenced dances with occasional 'refined' adaptations of the more down-home music of calypsonians. He was conversant also with the defiant or reflective chants of stickfighters (originating in a drum dance known as *kalenda*). The term *calenda*, or *colinda*, is known in Louisiana, and derives from dances performed across French- and Spanish-speaking Latin America during the slavery period. At the turn of the century, string bands — such as those run in Mississippi by Sid Hemphill, or the Chatmon family — served a similar function to that of Belasco's in Trinidad, some playing to both elite white audiences as well as rural black people. Belasco's unit, however, was closer in organisation and status to Armand Piron's New Orleans Orchestra (which performed at elite venues). Like Piron, he was a reading musician, in contrast with members of Lovey's Trinidad String Band, who played by ear.

Island contemporaries did not replicate Belasco's early achievements — he was recorded annually by Victor from 1914 to 1920, sometimes undertaking several sessions per year, usually with American studio musicians. This lull in recording local Trinidad music may have been a result of the economic circumstances of the First World War. Statistics indicate there was no decrease in the flow of West Indian migrants in this period; indeed, by 1917 they were almost certainly welcomed as extra labor for the American war effort.

Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association

A year earlier (1916) saw the arrival in the United States of the black Jamaican political leader Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). He was one of a line of African-American people who advocated Pan-Africanism. George Liele (1750-1826) might be considered a precursor,¹⁷ but Edward W. Blyden (born in the Danish West Indies in 1832, died 1912) was one of the most active in the late nineteenth century — on behalf of his adopted country, Liberia.¹⁸ In the United States, Bishop Henry M. Turner

(1833-1915), of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was a similar prototype.¹⁹ The Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams coined the term Pan-Africanism in London, in 1900, when he held a conference on the subject in which delegates participated from three continents — Africa, the Americas and Europe.²⁰

Garvey's message found fertile ground in the United States, and by 1920 he had established a mass movement based on his Universal Negro Improvement Association. This included the formation of a steamship company called the Black Star Line (incorporated in 1919). The rise of the U.N.I.A. took place at the same time as the advent of the creative period of black culture in New York City known as the Harlem Renaissance. With the latter in mind, it is probably no coincidence that the first popular blues cut by black performers were recorded in New York at the beginning of this decade.

There were other significant black radicals from the Caribbean in Harlem who shaped the politics of this period. Some prominent in the cultural milieu include the Jamaican poet and novelist Claude McKay, P. M. H. Savory, a Guyanese physician and (from 1936) co-publisher of the *Amsterdam News* — the principal black newspaper in New York — and Herbert (or Hubert) Julian, the Trinidad-born, accident-prone, parachutist and aviator, who became an official in the U.N.I.A.²¹

Trinidadians Record In New York — 1921

It was not until 1921, a year in which Belasco did not record, that Trinidad musicians again travelled to New York to cut sides for Victor. Walter Merrick (piano) accompanied the vaudevillian Johnny Walker, whose songs were associated with recent Carnivals. Merrick's solos ranged from "Creole" and 'Venezuelan' waltzes to interpretations of 'Paseos' (or two-steps). According to Theodore van Dam, Merrick's rendering of the 'Tobago paseo' *Bulldog Don't Bite Me* (Victor 73060) is representative of Jelly Roll Morton's 'Spanish Tinge' as well as 'early blues and boogie woogie' piano styles. He reports also that Walker's *Go 'Way Gal*, the 'Trinidad Calypso' on the reverse of this record, has Merrick using 'very much the "rolling bass" effects of early [Jimmy] Yancey, [Jack] Dupree, etc.' in his accompaniment.²² These observations await independent aural verification.

Walter Merrick was born in St. Vincent in 1896, but moved to Trinidad at the age of five. He built a reputation as a performing musician and subsequently took up composition. He obtained a Doctorate in medicine at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and reportedly undertook postgraduate training in London and Edinburgh — the latter city's prestigious medical reputation was of great importance among educated British West Indians in the inter-war period. In pursuit of a medical career, however, Merrick did not forsake all of his musical interests.²³

Harry Pace, the black American entrepreneur, left the music publishing company he ran with blues composer W. C. Handy and launched Black Swan Records in January 1921. This, the first wholly owned black record company in the United States, is generally considered to be another signal for the nascent Harlem Renaissance.²⁴ By the middle of the year Ethel Waters and Alberta Hunter were among performers on the company's roster. In October, Black Swan reported sales as far afield as the Philippines and the West Indies.²⁵ It is not surprising therefore that early in 1922 Lionel Belasco's South American Orchestra (again, probably studio musicians) cut six sides for the company with West Indian and Latin American sales in mind.

Changing Fortunes of the U.N.I.A. — 1922

1922 was a crucial year in the fortunes of Marcus Garvey and the U.N.I.A. The success of this mass movement had created considerable opposition among some black intellectuals and concern in certain quarters of both the U.S. and British administrations. The Black Star Line had suffered numerous setbacks, owing to financial mismanagement, and eventually this was to lead to Garvey's downfall. The annual U.N.I.A. convention was less successful than in previous years and questions were raised regarding a meeting Garvey attended with Ku Klux Klan officials. Above all, his flirtation with the Klan had 'turned some of the most influential West Indian Harlemites' against him. Until then, David Levering Lewis notes, 'writers Claude McKay and Eric Walrond, bibliophile Arthur Schomburg, numbers king Casper Holstein, and [fellow Jamaican, the] Marxist W. A. Domingo had overlooked his excesses because of his tremendous potential for success.' On 12 January 1922, Garvey was arrested for mail fraud relating to the failed Black Star Line. Released on bail, he did not appear in court until fifteen months later, legal proceedings against him taking the best part of three years. Tried in May 1923, he was convicted on 18 June, remained in gaol until September of the same year but was released pending appeal, which was not heard until February 1925. He lost the appeal and spent two years in prison before being deported from the United States.²⁶

Composition of *West Indies Blues*

It is against this backdrop that the black American composers Edgar Dowell, Clarence Williams and Spencer Williams wrote their *West Indies Blues*. Born in Louisiana, the publisher of this sheet music, Clarence Williams, was a jazz and blues musician who composed and recorded prolifically. Between 1923 and 1928 he was employed as 'race-record judge' for the black record catalogue of the General Phonograph Corporation, which traded under the name of OKeh. Although Clarence Williams Music Publishing submitted *West Indies Blues* to the Library of Congress Copyright Office in December 1922, and it was registered on the sixteenth of that month,²⁷ the song was not recorded until a year later. Such a time lapse is unusual and presumably occurred because of legal sensitivities dictated by Garvey's arrest, trial, conviction, imprisonment, and release (pending appeal).

Expansion of 'West Indian' Recording Activities — 1923

The Victor Talking Machine Company briefly experimented with 'Race' records in 1923. It also decided to expand its line of English-speaking West Indian recordings. Sessions were held with a string band led by the talented violinist Cyril Monroe and vocals recorded by a popular Guyanese comedian Phil Madison, with Lionel Belasco supporting on piano. In addition to sales in the Caribbean, the company had recognized the scope for commercial advantage in the United States. A contemporary supplement spells out their reasoning:

THE steady increase of the West Indian population along the eastern seaports of the United States has stimulated the interest for West Indian records issued by the Victor Company. Phil Madison, one of the favorite singers in the West Indies, is giving a few numbers to the accompaniment of the piano and ukulele and the Monroe's Orchestra appears with instrumental selections which are sure to be welcomed by West Indians in this country.

Complementing this up-to-date repertoire (including pieces from the most recent Trinidad Carnival), Victor advertised items from their back catalogue — ranging from 1912 recordings by Lovey, to efforts by Walter Merrick made in 1921, plus many sides by Lionel Belasco's Orchestra.

Recordings of *West Indies Blues* — 1923-24

Following Garvey's conviction, incarceration, and release on notice of appeal, the initial version of the Dowell, Williams and Williams composition *West Indies Blues* was cut on 14 December 1923. Intended for purchase by black Americans, the song was issued in General Phonograph's 'Race' series (OKeh 8118). A New Orleans speciality, accompanied by the Orchestra of Armand J. Piron (in New York for an engagement), it was sung by Esther Bigeou, a Crescent City vocalist who toured the vaudeville circuit. A flow of instrumental and vocal versions of the composition ensued throughout the year, giving some indication of the success of Garvey's message on the black population and determination by his African-American opponents to minimize the effect of the U.N.I.A. Indeed, during 1922-23, the *Messenger*, a black radical journal from Harlem, ran a 'Garvey Must Go Campaign' with which the circulation of *West Indies Blues* might be associated indirectly.²⁸ Not strictly a blues, but a blues-based song in 'hokum' tempo, the lyrics of the published version of *West Indies Blues* have been interpreted by Ira De A. Reid, who points out 'how visibility through sheer numbers [of migrants] leads to ridicule and jest.' He notes that 'the words' were 'written in the parlance of the Jamaican immigrant [to] indicate the nature of this visibility:

West Indies Blues

1 Got my grip and trunk all packed,
 Steamship, I'm gwine to take her,
 So good-bye old New York Town,
 I'se gwine to Jamaica,
 When I git on de odder side,
 I'll hang aroun' de waters,
 I'll make my livin' sure's you born,
 A-divin' after quarters.

chorus Gwine home, won't be long,
 Gwine home, sure's you born,
 I'm gwine home, won't be long 'cause I got no time to lose,
 Gwine home, I can't wait, gwine home,

Mon, I'm late, I'm gwine home,
I can't wait, 'cause I've got the West Indies Blues,
Got the West Indies Blues, got the West Indies Blues.

2. Done give up the bestes' job,
A runnin' elevator,
I told my boss "Mon" I'd be back,
Sometime sooner or later,
When I get back to dis great land,
You better watch me Harvey,
'Cause 'm gonna be a great big "Mon",
Like my frien' Marcus Garvey.²⁹

Subtitled 'A Calipso' in the sheet music version and a recorded rendition by Viola McCoy (Vocalion 14801), the six vocal recordings of this song made in 1924 incorporate these standard lyrics, sometimes with chorus variation. Five of the renderings were performed by vaudeville blues women, with careers founded in touring theatre shows, and each was issued in the 'Race' market. McCoy, however, incorporates an extra verse:

3. I eat my nice big shrimp pelau,
There's nothing dat is better
Just like they have in Barbados,
With plenty salt and pepper,
When I get back there on de dock,
The Queen I will not face her,
'Cause all the people on this side,
They call me the monkey chaser.

(A 'monkey chaser' is an African-American nickname for a West Indian)

Ukulele Bob Williams cut the most distinctive variant of *West Indies Blues* (Paramount 12247). This also features lyrics that add to the more generalized insults:

3. When I get on de odder side,
If the Queen I have to face her,
Tell her, I don't like it over here,
'Cause they call me the monkey chaser,
I can stay up the whole night through,
I don't cease [for slumber]
I would try to figure out,
How to catch the policy number.
4. Came over here on a banana ship,
I thought that was fine,
I've got plenty of money now,
Goin' back on the Black Star Line,
If I die, don't want no one,
To call that undertaker,
Throw my body in the deep blue sea,
I'd float back to Jamaica.'

Ira Reid confirms that there were endless verses to the song, many being parodies depicting the 'habits, customs and institutions of the foreign-born Negro:

1. When I get on the other side,
I'll buy myself a Lizzie,
Climb up in a coconut tree,
And knock those monkeys dizzy.
2. Garvey, Garvey is a big man,
To take his folks to Monkey-land,
If he does that, I'm sure I can,
Stay right here with Uncle Sam.
3. When you eat split peas and rice,
You think you eatin' somethin',

But man you ain't taste nothin' yet,
'Till you eat monkey hips and dumplin'.

4. When a monkey-chaser dies,
Don't need no undertaker,
Just throw him in the Harlem River,
He'll float back to Jamaica.
5. When I get on the other side,
I'll buy myself a mango,
Grab myself a monkey gal,
And do the monkey tango.'

As can be seen, some of these sentiments relate directly to the additional verses recorded by McCoy and Williams. Garveyism and Jamaica are the focal points for these jibes.³⁰ The melody of *West Indies Blues*, however, appears to be based on a traditional U.S. motif used later for a number of hokum and medicine show pieces recorded by black North American performers, such as the influential 1928 recording *Beedle Um Bum* by The Hokum Boys (Paramount 12714).³¹ While antipathy towards Garvey is a most likely interpretation of the lyrics, the direct impact on West Indian migrants is less certain. Some evidence comes from the research of Ted Vincent, who believes the original intention of the lyrics was not derisory. He reports that the band of the U.N.I.A. played *West Indies Blues* in front of Liberty Hall (the organization's headquarters) in August of 1924. While this suggests approval, he notes that, by May of the following year, the Lafayette Theater in Harlem placed a newspaper announcement 'asking that patrons refrain from making requests for numbers which "might express sarcasm towards people from the islands, such as *West Indian Blues*."' ³² Undoubtedly, the common element of the English language is of greater significance in interaction between black people from the United States and their Caribbean counterparts. More concrete, in the words of the song, is the reflection on tensions resulting from mass migration — a maximum of 12,234 people from English-speaking islands sought a new life in the United States during 1924. This was the peak year for British West Indian emigration in the pre-1941 period; presumably because of fear of exclusion on the adoption of the U.S. National Origins Act (which formalized quotas for the first time).³³

Other 'Race' Recordings with a Similar Theme — 1924

The success of *West Indies Blues* led to a spate of similar compositions in 1924. One was *Black Star Line* by Edgar Dowell and Spencer Williams; subtitled 'A West Indian Chant,' this was registered for copyright on 26 April. Dowell wrote *Barbado[e]s Blues* with Clarence Williams (registered 18 June). The lyrics to *My Jamaica* (registered 29 May) were written by the black-American composer, vocalist and pianist Porter Grainger, and the melody by S. Monroe (on circumstantial evidence, the Trinidad violin player Cyril Monroe).³⁴ Each song was recorded for the 'Race' catalogs of various gramophone companies; Hazel Meyers being the first woman vaudeville singer to record *Black Star Line* (for Pathé Actuelle: 032053), circa 19 May. The next day, Rosa Henderson cut a version, together with *Barbadoes Blues*, for which Dowell provided the piano accompaniment — they were coupled on Vocalion 14825.³⁵ Henderson's *Black Star Line* was more complete lyrically than that performed by Meyers. As with *West Indies Blues*, the words poke fun at Garvey, concentrating on the failed shipping enterprise that brought about his downfall, but which he was endeavoring to revive as the Black Cross Trading & Navigation Company:

Black Star Line (A West Indian Chant)

1. Brothers and sisters, country man, you'd better get on board,
Big steamship gwine to sail away, Lord, with a heavy load,
It's gwine to take us all back home, yes every native style
And when we get there what a time, down on West Indies isle.
- chorus Get on board, country man,
I say, get on board, leave this land,
A-get on board, country man,
Gwine back on de Black Star Line.
2. Take my Bowie knife in hand and lay around de dock,
Jump right in the deep blue sea, pick fights with the sharks,
I'm gwine see Brother Abraham, go catch that 'Sly Mongoose,'
I'm going to see my downtown gal, and then we'll raise the deuce.

3. We'll eat monkey hips and rice, tomato, garlic too
Then we'll grab our favourite sport, child, chasing monkey, too,
I done put my lastest dime down on dis great steamship,
Lord, I hope that it won't sink, I wanna take this trip.

A line in the second verse mocks two well-known West Indian songs of the period. Originating in Barbados, probably during the first ten years of the century, *Buddy Abraham* [rather than 'Brother'] had been recorded by the 'Banda Belasco, Trinidad' in 1914. This was not released, although the company issued Belasco's solo piano rendition made the next year (Victor 67672). He cut a piano roll (QRS 2657) and registered the tune for copyright in 1924 (attesting to its continuing popularity).³⁶ Dating probably from the late 1910s, *Sly Mongoose* reached Trinidad from Jamaica by 1923, and was a Carnival hit that year, also being recorded respectively by Cyril Monroe and Phil Madison for Victor. Belasco registered this tune for copyright (December 1923) and the following March cut a piano roll of the piece (QRS 2544).³⁷ References in *Black Star Line* to these two songs, together with derogatory comments regarding 'monkey chasers,' exemplify antagonism between elements in black North American and migrant groups. The description 'country man' is an allusion to Garvey's followers and his avowed intention of organising the repatriation of black people to their place of origin, Africa.

Barbadoes Blues takes a different slant on the position of the migrant, reflecting on homesickness, but also hinting at 'primitive' West Indian attitudes that had no place in the sophisticated streets of black New York:

Barbadoes Blues

1. I tired livin' in this country, oh mon, ain't that no joke?
The people all act crazy, everywhere you go,
I'm going to a land, where the mammee apples* grow — mm,
Where I can go barefooted,
And they don't have no ice and snow.
2. I'm gwine back to Barbados, to the shore, to the shore,
To that place that I'll never, leave no more, leave no more,
Where little monkeys play up in the trees,
All you need to wear is BVDs,
Rain or shine, all the time,
The coconut juice tastes just like wine.
3. I'm gwine back to Barbados, there I'll stay, there I'll stay,
No one there to backbite poor me, I'll soon be free,
I'm gonna fill my rice with salt and pepper,
Tell you, mon, it sure tastes better,
I'm gwine back to Barbados, 'cause I got the Barbados blues.

speech Roll 'em boys, roll 'em , roll 'em.
Play them Barbados blues, boys, play 'em, play 'em.

* mammee apple: *mammea americana* (*Guttiferae*)

Columbia Records decided to feature versions of *Black Star Line* and *My Jamaica* in their 'Race' catalog when on 3 June they recorded George and Roscoe (George Gray and Roscoe Wilkham) singing to the accompaniment of a ukulele. This instrument (or the banjo) featured in several of these performances (for example, Clara Smith's version of *West Indies Blues* — Columbia 14019-D, made on 17 April), suggesting a deliberate effect on the part of record producers. The Grainger and Monroe composition was subtitled 'A West Indian Song' on release (Columbia 14024-D), and its lyrics continue with the derogatory theme of its predecessors:

My Jamaica (A West Indian Song)

1. There's a place I wanna go,
Where there ain't no ice and snow,
Where the summer wind him blow,
And the sugar cane she grow,
'Cause the money ain't so much,
But the rent be not so high,
There I can wear my silk [prize] shorts,
Play the cricket 'til I die,

chorus I love my Jamaica,
I just can't forsake her,
My poor heart I'll break her,
If I don't go where the coconuts grow, there,
There ain't no use in talking,
I'm so tired New Yorking,
Going to that West Indies home,
In my Jamaica.

2. Where the sun he never sets,
On the flag she always flies,
'Tis a British flag you bet,
I trying to love her 'til I die,
Going to have a jolly time,
Simply let myself a-loose,
When I am in this good old land,
I'll be [watch for] Sly Mongoose,

chorus It's in my Jamaica,
My ship she will make-a,
'Cause she will ride the breakers,
Sailing on down to where she bound to,
My good old Jamaica,
And don't you muck-rake her,
Down beneath our noble King,
Of my Jamaica.

The words imply that intended purchasers for this record were West Indian, or those that knew something of their culture: mention of cricket, the empire 'where the sun never sets,' and the British monarch and flag were specialist topics, unlikely to have had much appeal in the South!

Launch of OKeh's West Indian Series — 1924

At the same time George and Roscoe were cutting their sides, the General Phonograph Corporation made plans to enter the market for West Indian recordings in both the United States and the English-speaking Caribbean. Almost certainly, this was a further consequence of the peak in migration, probable success of similar recordings issued by the Victor Company, and contemporary popularity of West Indian themes in 'Race' catalogs. Commencing 18 July, they held three sessions to inaugurate a special series, the first release of which was OKeh 65001 by Slim Henderson. Cut on 30 July, his recordings comprised another version of *My Jamaica*, coupled with *Goofer Dust John*, on the theme of a feared obeah man in Trinidad. The latter was a further 'S.' Monroe composition registered for copyright on 29 May (on this occasion with words by Harvey Hogbin). Accompaniment was by the Fred Hall Orchestra, a standard white musical unit of the period. It is suggested that Slim Henderson is the black-American vaudevillian who was married to Rosa Henderson.³⁸ His version of *My Jamaica* is virtually the same as that performed by George and Roscoe. With a West Indian audience in mind, Slim Henderson's two sides emphasize differences within the migrant English-speaking Caribbean community. *My Jamaica* disparages the nostalgic sentiments of 'small-island' and 'small-time' Jamaicans (in the eyes of the lyricist), while *Goofer Dust John* is altogether more ominous in its message. It describes how easily the sophisticated 'unbeliever' will be 'fixed' by the power of 'old John's' evil magic from miles away in the Trinidad countryside. Unintentionally, in its portrayal, this established symbolically the more 'powerful' position and involvement of Trinidad performers in the New York record business during this period.³⁹

Sam Manning

The other singer featured in the new OKeh series was Sam Manning, whose career was to influence recordings of music from the English-speaking West Indies in the Caribbean, United States, and Britain for the next 35 years. Like Lionel Belasco and Walter Merrick, Manning almost certainly came from the black 'professional' strata. Born in Couva, Trinidad in either 1898 or 1899, after schooling he became a jockey and then a chauffeur and motor mechanic, working for a period in British Guyana. At the advent of the First World War he joined the Middlesex Regiment in England, and was transferred to the British West Indies Regiment, seeing service in France, Egypt and Palestine. During this period he

took up 'concert party work under the Colours.' It was this experience in entertainment that led to his stage career, commencing with a minstrel show tour of Britain following demobilisation and vaudeville engagements in Trinidad and other West Indian islands.

In the early 1920s, he gravitated to the United States. Settling in New York City, with difficulty he persuaded the proprietor of a Brooklyn theatre to rent him the premises and proceeded to stage a vaudeville programme based on his Caribbean expertise. Filling the theatre with expatriates, who had been aware of his talents in the West Indies, this successful engagement secured his reputation as an actor and vaudeville specialist. His first Broadway appearance was in 1925 playing Rastus in John Howard Lawson's Theater Guild production *Processional*. The latter, subtitled 'a jazz symphony of American life,' was an early radical play depicting a strike in West Virginia coal fields.⁴⁰

Manning's two sessions for Okeh in July 1924 set the scene for his recordings during the next ten years; they are a mix of traditional West Indian themes, and songs reflecting on the life of the newly arrived migrant in the U.S.A. Accompaniment by Palmer's Orchestra was in the style of an old-time Trinidad string band. As Steve Shapiro reports, *Susan Monkey Walk* (from Manning's first session, 18 July) 'mocks West Indian immigrants being taken in by their own Americanisation, but allows for a healthy look at being caught up in faddishness.'⁴¹

Susan Monkey Walk

1. There's a girl up Harlem has 'em wild, with her new brand style,
She comes from somewhere down West Indian isle,
Most everybody on the Avenue just crazy to do,
Little Susan's funny 'monkey walk.'
2. Have you seen Susan 'monkey walk?'
Oh, the whole town talk is that 'monkey walk,'
Oh, she got 'em beat with her monkey feet,
Her monkey style is what got 'em wild,
Her monkey hips and her monkey dips.
3. Seems to me I know that child, from down West Indian isle,
Her mother, father, bredder, sister too,
But now that she's a Harlem star, she pass by in her car,
And never even say "How-de-do."
4. Have you seen Susan 'monkey walk?'
Oh, the whole town talk, that 'monkey walk,'
Oh, Susan foot like puss in boots,
But she got 'em beat with her monkey feet,
Her monkey style is what's got 'em wild.

Amba Cay La' (Under The House), with which this was coupled, was a Trinidad Carnival piece, sung part in French Creole and part in English (Okeh 65003). For the second session (9 July) there was more of the same: *My Little West Indian Girl* depicts a male grieving for the girl he has mistreated who has gone back to the islands. *Baby* describes the unfortunate changes wrought on a young girl following her first sexual encounter (Okeh 65002).

Accompanied by Fred Hall's Orchestra, the following month Manning was involved in a session for the New York Recording Laboratories' Paramount 'Race' series, which featured two significant songs (Paramount 12229). Grace Taylor performed *Sweet Willie*, a lyric that Manning revised and recorded several times, later describing it as 'a typical St. Lucian beguine'.⁴² His own *African Blues*, however, is firmly in the mold of the other blues-based songs devoted to Garveyism that year: identifying 'country man' followers of the U.N.I.A. as romantic idealists, but also emphasising migrant nostalgia for 'home' — whether in the Caribbean or Africa. Not one of Manning's most successful recordings, its intended market was presumably North America, although no evidence is to hand for the export of Paramount's 'Race' series.

African Blues

1. I was born 'way down in West Indies,
And my dear old mammy taught me,
To love the fields of corn,
Where I was born,
But of late I've got a teaching,
That has set my heart a-yearning

For a land far away across the sea.

2. Country-man, gee! I've got those Africa blues,
Oh, country-man, it's the blues that I can't refuse,
They say the sunny skies just harmonize,
With my ebony skin and my coal-black eyes,
Country-man, true, I've got those Africa blues.
3. Country-man don't try to stop me,
Country-man don't try to block me,
Let me go, where there ain't no ice and there ain't no snow,
When you — when you miss my familiar face I'm gone,
To the land where I belong,
Africa, that land of the blazing sun.
4. Country-man, gee! I've got those Africa blues,
Country-man, it's the blues that I can't refuse,
They say the sunny skies just harmonize,
With my ebony skin and my coal-black eyes,
Country-man, true, I've got those Africa blues.
5. Oh, country-man, get your bundle and come with me,
Country-man, to that land far across the sea,
Ain't no time to be flirtin' around,
Ain't no time to be sheiking the town,
Country-man, gee! I've got those Africa blues.

Along with previous examples from this selection of 'compositions,' by October each piece had been registered for copyright, submitted by either Manning (sometimes with an associate) or 'S.' Monroe.⁴³

While *African Blues* is probably the first to establish continental repatriation as an objective for some West Indians (note there is no direct reference to black North Americans), its message cannot be said to be wholly positive. Indeed, the ambivalence may have been intentional, so as to appeal to the widest possible audience. Africa is portrayed as utopia in relation to North America and the West Indies, but the 'ebony skin and coal black eyes' of the lyricist have a whiff of minstrelsy and the vaudeville portrayal of black people that became the norm among whites in blackface during the nineteenth century. Sam Manning was a master at maximising the effect of such portrayals, which were also adapted by black entertainers in the Americas, following the U.S. Civil War.

Research in the *Negro World*, the U.N.I.A.'s weekly newspaper, adds a few details regarding Manning's relationship to Garvey's organisation. A 'Monster Benefit' in aid of the U.N.I.A. was held at Liberty Hall, New York, 16 December 1924. Staged by Manning and Porter Grainger, they also co-composed the song 'Back Home on *The Booker T. Washington*' (about one of the Black Star Line ships) that was featured in the programme.⁴⁴ Ted Vincent reports that the show included a performance by the black vaudevillian Lena Wilson. Subsequently, he indicates, there was an 'Ethiopian Barn Dance' at the same location with 'American and West Indian blues,' and Manning and Grainger seem to have involved Lionel Belasco in efforts to organize a 'club' to recruit artists to play there.⁴⁵

From his earliest recordings, it is evident Sam Manning is significant in the evolution of black music from the West Indies in the United States simply in the light of his repertoire. There was, however, much more to Manning's role than this. His music appealed to U.S. audiences as well as West Indians, as witnessed by the appearance of a number of his records in U.S. 'Race' catalogs. In addition, unlike most of his British Caribbean contemporaries who recorded regional music, he was not bound by Trinidad norms, adopting and interpreting songs from other islands, in particular Jamaica.

All these facts indicate that Manning became accepted very quickly by members of the Tin Pan Alley musical hierarchy in New York, both with black and white Americans (who ultimately held the purse strings). A succession of almost 40 recordings for Okeh, Paramount, Columbia and Brunswick between 1924 and 1928 attest to this recognition, as do reports of his capacity as a stage entertainer. Thus Roi Otley writes, 'Sam "Squashie" Manning, a West Indian comedian achieved considerable popularity on the Harlem stages with his comic distortions of the immigrant Negro.'⁴⁶

Okeh's West Indian Series — 1925

Okeh continued with its West Indian series throughout 1925, with three sessions by Sam Manning, and one by Monroe's String Band. On two of his recording dates, the Cole Jazz Trio, or Cole Mentor Orchestra, accompanied Manning. 'Mentor' identifies a particular Jamaican dance. In 1910 this was defined 'as the "shay shay" ... or *mento*,' performance of which was 'invariably accompanied by words' and '... at the height of its popularity [each lyric was] sung and whistled all over the island' with 'the air [being] played at every "practice dance"'.⁴⁷ The Trinidad reed player Rupert Cole, who arrived in New York City in 1924, might be the bandleader here. His later playing style, however, does not bear aural comparison with either the clarinet or saxophone on these early sides, suggesting another West Indian musician with the same surname may have been active in the metropolis during this period. Among other bands, Rupert Cole worked with Lucky Millinder's Orchestra in the 1950s.⁴⁸ Coincidentally, Walter Merrick appears to have migrated to the U.S.A. in 1925, as did his compatriot Joe Willoughby (another Trinidadian).⁴⁹ The latter is possibly the vocalist Lyle Willoughby who recorded with Merrick for Victor in that year, and perhaps the Lyle Lorieo who sang with the Monroe unit for Okeh — Merrick is credited as 'composer' on the labels for both sides of this record (Okeh 65006).

Only Manning's repertoire is of direct concern at this point. His first Okeh session in 1925 — 29 June — was with the Cole Jazz Trio (clarinet or saxophone, guitar and cuatro — a small ukulele-like guitar of Venezuelan origin). This comprises versions of traditional West Indian pieces (65004, 65005). A second session in August, however, included *Englerston Blues*, with a composer credit to the 'Englerstone Quartette' (Okeh 65007). Accompanied by alto saxophone, guitar and ukulele (according to the label), this is another homily on the Garvey movement and incorporates sentiments from the lyrics to previous songs on the subject. The theme appears to be devoted to a mythical utopia, although Englerston itself is the name of a recently constructed residential quarter to the south of Nassau, New Providence Island in the Bahamas. The settlement of 'neat little cottages' had been built 'through the enterprise of a citizen of Florida' named 'Englerston'.⁵⁰

Englerston Blues

1. There's a steamboat leaving out today,
 For good old [Meto] island,
 I'm goin' there to stay for good,
 And build me a home it's understood,
chorus I'm goin' home, and it wouldn't be long
 Goin' home, as sure's you born,
 Goin' home, I can't wait,
 'Cause I got that Englerston Blues, Lordy Lord,
 I got that Englerston Blues.
2. When I get to Englerston,
 Get me a horse and carriage,
 Then I'll get me an Englerston gal,
 And do that thing called marriage.
3. When I get to Englerston,
 You'd better watch me Harvey,
 I'm gonna be a great big 'Man,'
 Like my friend Marcus Garvey.
chorus
4. When I settle in Englerston,
 I'll get myself a mango,
 I'll grab myself an Englerston gal,
 And do that shimmy shango,
5. While I live in Englerston,
 I'll hang around the waters,
 Make my livin' sure as was born,
 Divin' after quarters.
chorus

6. Now when I get back over there,
I'll write you all about it,
I'll tell you folks about Englerston,
And you can't do without it.
7. Now I was born in old Jamaica,
In a place they call Kingston,
But I'm going to write my people home,
They must come over to Englerston.

chorus

8. I've been all over the United States,
Even been to China,
But the best place I have ever been,
Is Englerston of the island.
9. So goodbye all you northern folk,
I'm goin' back to the islands,
I'll make my home in Englerston,
Instead of courtin' asylum.

chorus

With the adoption of lines and other elements from *West Indies Blues*, the underlying message of the text remains ambivalent towards those who believed that resettlement was the solution to all their problems. This, however, was mitigated by Manning's sympathetic delivery and is one possible reason for his broad-based popularity — having the capacity to appeal to the sentiments of pro- and anti-Garvey audiences, amongst others. The lyrics to the coupling for OKeh 65007, *Home's Delight*, mention a 'Captain Engler' who might be synonymous with Englerston the benefactor. This piece plays on nostalgia for West Indian food (rice) in contrast with grits from the United States.

Sam Manning Records for Columbia — 1925

On 21 September, Manning cut his first session for the Columbia Phonograph Company. Four sides were recorded and released in Columbia's export series — two were Trinidad calypsos but, significantly, one coupling was also issued in the domestic 'Race' series: *Let Go My Hand* and *Bungo* (Columbia 14110-D). The former was Manning's first collaboration on record with Porter Grainger, and concerns relations between a male West Indian migrant and a North American girl. Manning is endeavoring to resist the temptation of 'Dinah Lee,' a black woman of North American parentage. He favors his 'sweet West Indian girl,' although (verse 5) he also retains slight suspicions about the latter.

Let Go My Hand

1. Now listen Miss Dinah Lee
Please keep away from me,
I got myself a sweet West Indian girl.
2. She has promised to marry me,
Take me down to the West Indies,
Keep away, Dinah Lee, keep away.
3. Let go my hand, Dinah Lee,
Please let go my hand,
Done got myself this sweet West Indian girl.
4. I've made up my mind to go,
Down where the coconuts grow,
Let go, Dinah Lee, please let go.
5. I know we're gonna be happy, as happy can be,
If she don't make a monkey of me,
Let go, Dinah Lee, please let go.
6. (repeats 3.)
7. She come from the land of the calalu,

The goofer dust, and the cascadu,
Let go, Dinah Lee, please let go.

8. Come like [a lion] from the [monkey meat],
Just as gentle and just as sweet,
Let go, Dinah Lee, please let go.

The other side of this record, *Bungo*, is a West Indian dance piece. Accompaniment by the Cole Jazz Orchestra is closer idiomatically to black North American jazz and probably it was this, plus the standpoint of the lyrics to *Let Go My Hand*, that persuaded Columbia to widen the market for these two recordings.

The third OKeh session was held *circa* 30 December and concentrated on West Indian repertoire. *Barbadoes Blues*, devoted to nostalgia for a particular Caribbean island, however, was another in the mold of popular blues-based songs (OKeh 65009), and a more sympathetic treatment than Edgar Dowell's earlier composition with the same title.

Manning's First Releases in the OKeh "Race" Series — 1926

Manning's popularity with black American audiences almost certainly led to his next OKeh release being allocated to their U.S. 'Race' series. Recorded in February 1926, this comprises two songs with local appeal, accompanied by his Blue Hot Syncopators. In accordance with OKeh's marketing strategy, the 'jazz' element in the backing is particularly pronounced. The lyrics to both songs are North American oriented. *Go I've Got Somebody Sweeter Than You* is standard fare, but *Keep Your Hands off That* has a Harlem theme depicting popular recreations, as well as male-female relations:

Keep Your Hands off That

1. In Harlem's colored section,
[Now] the browns of all complexion,
There's a saying 'keep your hands off that,'
In a parlor social, in a cabaret,
It's 'keep your hands off that,'
2. Every woman has got that slogan,
'Keep your hands off that,'
It's too bad how she'll get you mad,
Well 'keep your hands off that,'
Gee, I'll do the Charleston, the Pigeon Wing,
But it's 'keep your hands off that,'
Even Black Bottom, Shake That Thing,
But it's 'keep your [hands] off that.'
3. Say, how she'll hold you, hug you and squeeze you,
But it's 'keep your hands off that,'
She'll call you honey, make you spend your money,
But it's 'keep your hands off that,'
And she'll look so temptin' dressed up in satin,
But it's 'keep your hands off that,'
And it's aggravatin' when she starts to shakin',
But it's 'keep your hands off that.'
4. When you take her home, you'll find she don't live alone,
But it's 'keep your hands off that,'
You'll hear her laughter, you know you are a sucker,
But it's 'keep your hands off that.'

Manning cut another session for Columbia's export series on 27 May. Two of the sides were instrumentals and described as 'Mentors' on the record labels, although *Hold Him Joe (My Donkey Want Water)* adapted the melody of a Jamaican 'Digging Sing' or work song (Columbia 2409-X).⁵¹ *Oh Emily!*, the sung performances on the reverse of this record, was designated a Trinidad Carnival piece, but *Jamaica Blues* (Columbia 2410-X) is another in the familiar idiom of nostalgic blues-based songs. This was co-composed with the Jamaican pianist and bandleader Adolph Thenstead (with assistance from Spencer Williams, when the song was registered for copyright in December).⁵² The lyrics yet again describe a 'country man' tired of 'New Yorking,' longing for his island home. The

homesick Jamaican also has 'the sweetest Bajan gal,' emphasising the position of both Barbados and Jamaica in the popular imagination as important points of departure for British West Indian migrants.

The Identity of the 'King' of the Zulus?

Distinctive differences between black people from the Caribbean and those born in the United States are the subject of an interjection written into the performance of *The King Of The Zulus (At A Chit' Lin' Rag)*, recorded by Louis Armstrong's Hot Five in Chicago, Illinois on 23 June (Okeh 8396). With the line up of Louis (cornet), Kid Ory (trombone), Johnny Dodds (clarinet), Johnny St. Cyr (banjo) and Lil Armstrong (piano), this New Orleans oriented group was at the height of its considerable powers. Although a non-Crescent City musician received credit as composer — Louis' wife, Lillian Hardin(g) (Armstrong) — the theme is devoted to the activities of a New Orleans *Mardi Gras* masquerade band. The Zulu Aid and Pleasure Club had been participating in *Mardi Gras* since at least 1916, and almost certainly before. Like similar organisations involved in Carnival in Trinidad, the association also acted as a mutual aid society and held balls and other events to raise funds for these purposes.⁵³ King Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band's *Zulus Ball*, made in 1923 (Gennett 5275), was the first recording by New Orleans musicians devoted to these functions, but this was purely an instrumental. The interpolation in the Hot Five's *King of the Zulus* brings into play a stereotype of the Jamaican seen to have been current in the lyrics of several compositions recorded in North America in this period. A representation of a Jamaican migrant or perhaps a member of a ship's crew, (personated by 'Clarence Babcock') suddenly arrives at the Chitterling Rag — held supposedly in a black quarter of New Orleans. His interruption appears to reinforce perceptions of Jamaican migrants as uncouth, and believers in the 'back to Africa' movement, but also seeking the approval of their black peers in North America:

The King of the Zulus (At A Chit' Lin' Rag)

- U.S. (band) [instrumental, featuring trombone, with accompaniment]
- J. (C.B.) Wait man, wait, stop, stop, wait!
- U.S. (Lo A.) What's the matter? — Eh, what you mean by interrupting my solo?
- J. (C.B.) Man, it 'cause I from Jamaica and I don't mean to interrupt your party, but one of me 'country man' tell me there's a chitterlin' rag going on here. Madam, fix me one order of those things you call chitterlin' but I call 'em inner tube, and I play one of me native jazz tune.
- U.S. (Li A.) Twenty cents-hot for my chitterlin'.
- U.S. (band) [instrumental, featuring cornet and banjo, with accompaniment]
- J. (C.B.) Do you like it, man?
- Key** U.S.: idiomatic performance by Black person(s) from the United States
- J.: representation of a Black person from Jamaica

This is a highly charged but also enigmatic performance. The vaudeville exchange could be construed to be anti-Jamaican, especially with regard to Garvey and his 'country man' followers. The patter, however, is succeeded by one of the most emotional cornet solos ever recorded by Louis Armstrong and at the end the 'Jamaican's' request for endorsement gives particular authority to Armstrong's interpretation. The implication of the title, that it represents a performance at a fund raising dance (a chit' lin' rag) held by the pre-eminent black *Mardi Gras* organisation in New Orleans, begs the question as to the identity of the 'King of the Zulus.' He might be the annually elected symbolic leader of the masquerade band (a position held by Armstrong in 1949) but, conversely, he could be the Jamaican. In both instances, these personalities can be interpreted as representative of the African origin of black Americans and this may be the deeper and emotional significance of the presentation by the Hot Five.

The success of the Armstrong performance can be measured by two cover versions recorded by Okeh's competitors. On 22 October, the Dixie Washboard Band — a Clarence Williams group — recorded *King of the Zulus* for Columbia in New York. The rendering follows the same pattern, although the interjections are far less slick and slightly different. The Jamaican impersonation (said to be by Clarence Todd) is belabored, neither does the speaker seek approval at the end of the performance. Coupled with *The Zulu Blues*, a trite song about the *Mardi Gras* band, from the same session, this release might have been aimed at black tourists visiting New Orleans for the Carnival, although the quality of the performances makes this conjecture unlikely (Columbia 14171-D).

Eleven days later (2 November), a New York group led by Thomas Morris, but 'masquerading' as the New Orleans Blue Five, cut *The King of the Zulus* for Victor (20316). The same format was used. Again, there is slight variation in the spoken asides and the quest for salutation at the end is omitted. In addition to being important pointers to the significance of New Orleans Carnival in the history of jazz (and Crescent City blues), these recordings also reflect a continuing ambivalence in this period by some black Americans towards Jamaicans, whether transients or migrants. For example, the proximity of West Indian settlers seems a likely reason for the two New York renderings of *King of the Zulus* placing much greater emphasis on negative stereotypes.

Manning Appears in Harlem Musicals — 1926-27

On 2 October, one month before the session by the New Orleans Blue Five, Buddy Christian, the guitarist with the group, had registered *Charleston Hop* for copyright; this was a joint composition with Sam Manning. Christian was a long-time musical associate of Clarence Williams, whose publishing company handled the proceedings. Coincidentally, just one week after the Thomas Morris unit cut their cover of *The King of the Zulus*, the Lafayette Theater in Harlem staged the first night of *Hey Hey*, a musical in which Manning starred. This successful show received mixed press reaction;⁵⁴ it also has some notoriety in that it was used to break a strike at the theatre by black projectionists.⁵⁵ Produced by Amy Ashwood Garvey — the separated first wife of Marcus Garvey — the presentation went on tour at the time she began a suit for divorce against her husband.⁵⁶ Thus, by the time the production reached Pittsburgh, with a slightly different cast, but Manning still one of the leading lights, the plot had been altered to a parody of the 'rise and fall of Marcus Garvey'.⁵⁷ This and Manning's alliance with Amy Ashwood confirms Manning's disassociation with Garvey's organisation. By January the show was in Chicago.⁵⁸ A booking at the Royal Theatre Baltimore in May, however, was cancelled at the last minute, leaving Manning and Amy Ashwood filing suit against the proprietors.⁵⁹ Manning remained one of Ashwood's closest allies until his death, while engaged on a joint project, in Ghana *circa* 1961.⁶⁰

General acclaim in Harlem vaudeville theatres was probably one reason for Sam Manning's next session being released in the Okeh U.S. 'Race' series. Recorded on 23 June 1927, the repertoire, however, was Caribbean. There were remakes of three sides cut previously for Columbia — the dance piece *Bongo*, and two calypsos, *Lignum Vitae*, and *Emily* (in this version, Gwendolyn is identified as a 'Bajan girl') and another dance melody, *Pepper Pot*. The accompaniment was by Adolph Thensead's Mentor Boys, the leader being the pianist from Jamaica. A little more than a month later, on 1 August, Lionel Belasco organized the first session by the Trinidad calypsonian Wilmoth Houdini, whom he had brought to New York to record for Victor. This further expanded the export market for British Caribbean repertoire, but had no immediate impact in Harlem. On 15 August, however, to great acclaim, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Sam Manning launched their new show *Brown Sugar* at the Lafayette Theater. Porter Grainger collaborated with Manning on the music and, according to a pre-show advertisement, Fats Waller & His Harlem Serenaders provided musical accompaniment (Waller was house organist at the Lafayette in this period).⁶¹ In a preview of the show, the *New York Amsterdam News* noted Manning was developing 'a new character which will be brimful of fun, in that this new departure will show him as an educated colored British West Indian, "Sir Quashie," the latter knighted by the King of England and with all the earmarks with which so many are familiar.'⁶² Undoubtedly this is the origin of Manning's 'Mr. Squash,' or 'Squashie' comedy character for which he became famous. The name 'Quashie' has its roots in Africa. A later Amy Ashwood Garvey and Sam Manning presentation, *Black Magic*, was advertised in the *New York Amsterdam News* for 'One Week beginning November 21' at the Lafayette Theater. This production starred Manning and Mercay Marquiz, with Anna Freeman, Doe Doe Green, Anabella McGerry, Duckett and Conway and a Beauty Chorus.⁶³

Parlor Socials or 'Rent Parties'

Musical extravaganzas were not the only form of popular entertainment or recreation in urban centers, there were the usual cabarets, drinking dives, and dances. The latter parallel similar functions in country districts throughout the South. In this respect Ira De A. Reid identifies "'struggles," "break-downs," "razor-drills," "flop-wallies," and "chitterling parties"'. Other reports indicate that when activities were held outdoors they were the domain of small bands (string, brass, fife and drum), and might also attract guitar-playing songsters. For small-time entertainment in enclosed locations, the principal instrument was the piano, which for migrants to conurbations became associated with a particular event, the house rent party. These gatherings undoubtedly grew out of collective African-American traditions for survival and advancement in situations of extreme deprivation, which existed

in the Caribbean as well as the United States. In Harlem, with its mixed population of locals and migrants, from both the South and the Caribbean, there was the potential for a greater variety of music being played on such occasions.

Wallace Thurman sets the scene:

Saturday night comes. There may be only piano music, there may be a piano and drum, or a three or four-piece ensemble. Red lights, dim and suggestive, are in order. The parlor and the dining room are cleared for the dance, and one bedroom is utilized for hats and coats. In the kitchen will be found boiled pigs feet, ham hock and cabbage, hopping John (a combination of peas and rice), and other proletarian dishes.

The music will be barbarous and slow. The dancers will use their bodies and the bodies of their partners without regard to the conventions. There will be little restraint. Happy individuals will do solo specialties, will sing, dance — have Charleston and Black Bottom contests and breakdowns....⁶⁴

Ira Reid made a study of these events in the 1920s and quotes an undated 'News Item' (no source given):

Growing out of economic stress, this form of nocturnal diversion has taken root in Harlem — that section known as the world's largest Negro center. Its correct and more dignified name is 'Parlor Social,' but in the language of the street, it is caustically referred to as a house rent party.

'Parlor Socials' (per Sam Manning's *Keep Your Hands off That*), 'Social Whist Parties,' 'Social Parties,' and similar activities in Harlem are generally associated with the stride piano playing of such performers as James P. Johnson, Lucky Roberts, and Willie 'The Lion' Smith. Undoubtedly, players rooted in a variety of traditions participated — Reid mentions unknowns such as 'Kid Professor,' 'Blind Johnny,' and 'Kid Lippy'; Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis elicited stories of others.⁶⁵ There were also the West Indians: Lionel Belasco, Walter Merrick, Taffy Palmer (leader of Palmer's Orchestra), and Adolph Thenstead have been mentioned. Other pianists who recorded include Jack Celestain, Berry Barrow and Donald Heywood.⁶⁶

A Trinidadian, Heywood was known principally for his role in the black musical theatre.⁶⁷ He had recorded solo for Black Swan in 1922 (two popular tunes of the day) and as an accompanist to Marion Harrison. Under the auspices of Ralph Peer (Victor's talent scout) in 1927 and 1928, however, he undertook a series of sessions for the export market. The Victor log labels all these sides as by 'Race' artists, although each was issued in the company's West Indian catalogue. They reflect repertoire from the islands or the migrant experience in New York. The first session was held on 9 June 1927, and comprised two instrumentals by Donald Heywood's West Indian Band plus two vocals by "Marsa Langman" accompanied by the same group: Heywood on piano, two saxophonists and a cuatro player. Langman was Sam Manning, who presumably hid his identity in the light of a contract with the Columbia Phonograph Company's recently acquired Okeh label (for whom he recorded two weeks later). One side, *Touch Me All About, But Don't Touch Me Dey*, is calypso; its coupling, *Mister Joseph Strut Your Stuff*, (with a Heywood composer credit) is pure black North American vaudeville in execution, though its subject is the Trinidad West Indian in New York and it is sung to an island melody (Victor 80777):

Mister Joseph Strut Your Stuff

sung	Dea-dad -da-ah-da, de-da-ada, Dea-da-dee-dee-da, De-de-ah-da-de-a-dah-dah.
spoken	Oh, do it son, Oh, play that thing boy. Ah-ha,
sung	Ah-ha.
spoken	Do you know anybody ever heard about Mister Joseph? — Yeah, Mister Joseph's the boy from Trinidad — And I mean folks, he's just too bad. Mister Joseph works down Down Town — yes sir!; and he runs an elevator. When you sees him on the Avenue you'll think he's a doctor — I mean! Mister Joseph gets his payroll every Saturday evening — yes sir!; fat payroll too — yes boy! — and the girls just wild 'bout him.

- See him, he standing up at a Hundred-And-Thirty-Fifth-Street corner on Seventh Avenue. And everybody talk. Atta boy! — you hear him talk.
- sung 1. See him a-coming a-down the road,
Walkin' stick, it ain't no load,
Dressed up in the latest style,
He makes the folks in Harlem wild,
- chorus Mister Joseph strut your stuff [...],
Strut your stuff like fun,
Call their bluff, you'll win that cake, my son,
Mister Joseph strut your stuff — Lord sir!
Show you come from far,
You certainly make a hit in this America.
1. Now, see him coming a-down that road,
And that walkin' stick, oh, it ain't no load,
Then he's dressed up in the latest style,
He makes the folks in Harlem wild,
- chorus [repeats initial chorus]
- chorus Oh Mister Joseph strut — Oh, look on him — Sir!
Oh strut — walk a jig!
Call their bluff, you'll win the cake my son,
Mister Joseph strut — ha-ha-ha!
Although you come from far,
You'll certainly make a hit in this America.

The compelling desire of the new migrant for success in his new country, and the means employed to this end, are the meat of this caricature, the lyrics of which suggest an extravagant and imposing stage routine in line with Manning's Harlem reputation.

A second Donald Heywood session took place on 27 December 1927 and featured Dan Michaels, who recorded a solo and two vaudeville duets with Hilda Perlino, each with accompaniment by Heywood on piano. Michaels' *Mongoose Hop* is virtually black North American hokum and the setting a New York 'Social' (Victor 80778). The words are different, but melodically this is based on the well-known U.S. black dance piece *Ballin' the Jack*, which was published in 1913.⁶⁸ The setting of the lyrics, with their theme of an 'experienced' settler's superiority over his naïve counterpart, however, gives some indication of adaptations made by migrants towards to their own community, whilst accommodating idioms from the host country. This allowed appeal to the widest audience possible.

Mongoose Hop

- sung 1. Went down to the dance the 'hother' night,
Saw a new step, filled me with delight,
Almost laughed 'till I cracked my sides,
When Miss 'Molinden' tried,
This new invention is fine,
So why don't you get in line.
2. Put your hands on your hips, count one, two, three,
Makes funny motion, like climb the tree,
Put your right foot down, stamp all around,
Do the shimeree, until you touch the ground,
That's what they call the *Mongoose Hop*,
When you start to do it, boy, you can't stop,
So swing your partner, while you may,
Dance 'till the break of day.
- spoken Have a good time fellers. Oh, make that girl dance. He's all right baby, why don't you go ahead and dance with him? He hasn't been eatin' 'honions.' He-he. She feels the music. Lord today! Oh, baby! This girl is a mess! Baby, you must have been livin' in New York a very long time. Boy! Come here, come here, come here boy! Look! Look at her shakin' that thing too! He-he. Boy, I'm goin' to take this gal on

home with me. He-ee! Look at her! Look at her! Well, come on boy — this girl is a
— MESS!

sung 2. [repeat verse]

spoken Oh! Listen to that piano. Go ahead that boy playing that piano too. He-ee! It's too
bad boy. Oh no! You better stop playing that piano fool. I'm standing up over here
with my old lady. He-he! That's all.

The sophisticated piano accompaniment and Michaels' smooth delivery indicate performers of
experience. This is true likewise for the duets with Hilda Perleno, one of which, *Susanne*, emphasizes
problems encountered by West Indian males in their relationships with North American females.

Susanne

sung D.M. Rumour spreading h-all around, I don't understand,
Everybody seems to take me for a monkey man,
All on account of Susanne, that good for nothing brown,
I don't want no h-alibi, 'cause I'm goin' to call her down.
Oh Susanne, Susanne, you h-ain't treatin' me right,
Susanne, Susanne, you stay out every night,
Susanne, Susanne, you been gettin' my pay
After I've been toiling and sweating every day,
Susanne, Susanne, you loving someone else,
Susanne, Susanne, don't put me on the shelf,
Baby, if you don't stop your cheatin'
I'm goin' to meet you and gi' you a beating,
Susanne, Susanne, you ain't treatin' me right.

spoken D.M. Yes sir, I'm goin' down there and see Susanne, because she sure ain't treatin' me
right

[knocking]

Open that door woman! What you tryin' to do?

H.P. You here again? Why don't you stay away from here? What's the idea?

D.M. What is you trying to do? Keep me out of my home now?

H.P. Does this apartment look to you like a coconut tree?

D.M. Eh-eh, you tryin' to insult me after I give you all my affection and my love with my
whole heart.

H.P. I didn't order coal!

D.M. No, but you're hard as a sealskin coat. And now I catch you walking out with another
sheik and you come tell me 'bout how you didn't h-order no coal. The other day I
bought you a player piano and the first thing you play when I first come in the house
is *Bye Bye Blackbird*. Where did you get that at?

H.P. You better get away from here with that vulgarity. Brother — you are dark and
unlucky.

H.P. Eh-eh.

sung D.M. [repeats lines 5 through 13 of initial verse]

Here the unsatisfactory relationship first identified in Sam Manning's *Let Go My Hand* (Columbia
14110–D) is brought into the open in a way that suggests the subject may have become common in
certain black New York vaudeville presentations at this time, a proposal enhanced by the presence of
Hilda Perleno, who was in the cast of a number of black musicals during the 1920s and early 1930s.⁶⁹

The supposition is also reinforced by similar duets recorded by Sam Manning and Anna Freeman in the
year following. Donald Heywood's final session for Victor, in April 1928, concentrates on West
Indian repertoire with two other vocalists, Timothy Dunn and Adrian Johnson.

Manning's Comic Dialogues with Anna Freeman — 1928

Sam Manning sustained his recording and stage career in 1928, the former with two new-year sessions
for the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company's Brunswick 'Race' series. The first (2 February)
incorporated a Trinidad calypso *Woman Sweeter Than Man* that had been interpreted in 1927 by
Wilmoth Houdini, the Trinidad calypsonian domiciled in New York. Manning's *Woman Sweeter than
Man* was coupled with *Bouncing Baby Boy*, about the plight of an unmarried mother, once again

reflecting on the lives of West Indian migrants in the metropolis. A record company file note indicates that this was 'for special release New York territory'.

It is, however, Manning's second session for Brunswick (19 March) that is of particular interest in exploring the relationship between black West Indian and North American culture in New York. The occasion comprised a series of four comic dialogues between Anna Freeman (the American woman) and Manning (the West Indian man). Composer credits for these are attributed to Porter Grainger, who accompanies on the piano. His involvement may indicate that this material had been included in *Brown Sugar*, but no particulars have been traced regarding the show's music; Anna Freeman, however, was one of the featured performers in this and the subsequent show *Black Magic*.⁷⁰ Grainger had recorded one song, *Nothin' but a Double-Barrel Shot Gun*, in a purely black North American context in October of the previous year (Okeh 8516), and it is useful to compare the two versions. The lyrics to his solo rendition are:

Nothin' but a Double-Barrel Shot Gun

1. I'm mad, I'm mad today,
I can't see nothing but red,
So mad, yes I'm sad today,
I'd just as doggone soon be dead,
My gal just said she was through with me,
She didn't even say what for,
I know there's been some dirty work,
So here's what I says to her,
'T'ain't nothin' but a double-barrel shot gun,
'Gonna keep me away from you,
'Now sister, you'll think I'm the battle of "bulls run" [sic],⁷¹
'If you quit me like you said you do,'
Now listen,
'Even if I didn't want you, just get this under your hat,
'T'ain't nobody else gonna have you, so mama that's that,
'Cause nothin' but a double-barrel shot gun,
'Gonna keep me away from you.'
2. Now I'm mean and I'm evil, as a jealous man can be,
When it comes to a piece of furniture what belongs to me,
And I don't mind no funeral, 'cause I ain't scared to die,
And I couldn't be no different, if I doggone try,
Neither lightnin', nor thunder, don't scare me a bit,
Bring on your six-shootin' pistol,
I ain't even bothered about it,
I'll just take my bare hands and hit a lion on its jaw,
Rrrrr,
I ain't even scared of a mother-in-law, no sir,
Now I'll fight a nest of hornets,
With four rattle snakes throwed in,
I'll grab a tiger by its whiskers,
And I'll smack him on his chin,
But two long steel barrels, with the triggers pulled back,
Make me run clean on down the railroad track, yes sir,
But nothin' but a double-barrel shot gun,
Gonna keep me away from you.

This piece has the structure of the 'dozens,' the black North American tradition of exchanging boastful insults, although Grainger's version does not have the advantage of dialogue with another protagonist. Substantially rewritten for this purpose, it is apparent that *Nothin' but a Double Barrel Shotgun's Gonna Keep Me Away From You* by Manning and Freeman is comic in intent. The content, however, maintains antagonism between the West Indian migrant and black people of local origin, superimposed by the battle of the sexes — like the dozens, violence is never far from the surface. If matrix order is the sequence in which they were recorded, this was the first dialogue. Here, the American woman is seeking to leave her West Indian man:

Nothin' but a Double Barrel Shotgun's Gonna Keep Me Away From You

spoken S.M. Don't bother me woman. I'm mad, I'm mad today, and I can't see nothing but red.

A.F. Why, you'd better get glad, I mean glad today, 'cause tomorrow you might be dead.
S.M. Gal, does you mean to say that you is through with me, after all I have been to you?
A.F. Why, that's just exactly what I mean, and please stay away from me too.
S.M. Well, nothing doing. 'Cause nothin' but a double-barrel shotgun, gonna keep me away from you.
A.F. Is that so?
S.M. You think that I am the battle of 'bulls run?' [sic]
A.F. Guess it's bulls eye!
S.M. If you quit me like you said you'd do. Even if I didn't want you, sister, get this under your hat.
A.F. What?
S.M. 'Tain't nobody else gonna get you, so mama, dat's dat. 'Tain't nothin' but a double-barrel shotgun.
A.F. Gonna do what?
S.M. Gonna keep me away from you. Now, I'm mean, I'm evil.
A.F. I know.
S.M. As a jealous man can be.
A.F. Sure.
S.M. When it comes to a piece of furniture that belongs to me.
A.F. I'm sorry.
S.M. And I don't mind a funeral, 'cause I ain't scared to die
A.F. That's so.
S.M. Furthermore, I won't be different, hot mama, and I ain't goin' to try.
A.F. Now your lightnin' and your thunder don't scare me a bit. Go get your six-shootin' pistol, you know I ain't bothered 'bout it. Now you've been boastin' and you've been bragging, and I've heard it long enough, so I'm ready, Mr. Barrel of Bricks, to call your bluff.
S.M. I'll fight a nest of hornets, four rattlesnakes throwed in, grab a tiger by his whiskers and I'll whale him on his chin.
A.F. That so.
S.M. Woman, don't antagonize me, and your saucy talkin' back, 'cause I'll run and grab a freight train, and drag him off his tracks. You treat me like you think that I ain't nothin' but a joke.
A.F. You ain't.
S.M. Yet every pay day you is down there, to grab my envelope.
A.F. That's what you made for.
S.M. You'se talking graveyard language, woman, can't you plainly see, that I'm mad from my A down to my W, X, Y, Z.
sung Ain't nothin' but a double-barrel shotgun,
Gonna keep me away from you.
spoken A.F. Be careful.

This was coupled with the next item in matrix sequence, *Goin' Back to Jamaica* (Brunswick 7027). Here, the American woman is the protagonist, but it is the West Indian man — or, rather Jamaican, or 'country man' — who is given the last word:

Goin' Back to Jamaica

spoken S.M. Woman, I see what you is going to do. You is going to get me 'cacerated.
A.F. Man, what are you talking about, 'cacerated?
S.M. I said 'incarcerated'. I mean you is going to put me behind the four walls of the jail house.
A.F. Well, you could get cremated for all I care.
S.M. That's the way with you 'Merican women. You make a 'John' out of my country man and get him down to his last expense or his last farthing. Then you wants to kick him in the pants. But woman, let me tell you something, let me tell you something.
A.F. What is it now?
sung S.M. I'm gonna grab me a steamboat sure,
Yes, I'm goin' to take her,
Ain't gonna fool with you no more,
I'se gwine back to Jamaica.

Oh, woman, leave me 'lone, leave me 'lone, leave me 'lone,
Oh, woman, leave me 'lone, I don't want you no more.

A.F. You don't have to get no boat,
Grab a pick and shovel,
Here's your hat and here's your coat,
Now, go to the devil.
Oh, let me miss you, man, miss you, man, miss you man,
Oh, let me miss you, man, let me miss you now.

S.M. A wise man, he might change his mind,
A 'coolie' wouldn't change nothin',
Gal you make me so much mad,
I'm gwine land in Sing Sing prison.
Oh, woman, leave me 'lone, leave me 'lone — please leave me 'lone,

spoken A.F. I ain't done nothing.

sung S.M. Oh, woman, leave me 'lone, you gonna land me in Sing Sing prison.

spoken Woman, you is driving me to the very degradation. You'se fixin' to prohibit me of
seeing my poor old pappy and mammy, who's waitin' for me in my beloved Jamaica.
Listen woman, this cantankerous situation cannot last. Remember these words, what
I say, a eye for a eye, a tooth for a tooth — I'm gwine to get even with you some of
these days. 'Cause I'm from down the country, where they know the hoodoo. I'm
goin' to hoodoo you, woman.

A.F. Ah-ha, I know exactly what's the matter with you. Man, you're crazy. What you
need to do is to go to the bug house instead of to Jamaica. Brother, you'se bugged.
You've been a monkey every since I met you.

S.M. Don't you call me no monkey chaser. Don't you call me no monkey chaser.

A.F. I didn't call you no monkey chaser.

S.M. Well, don't you call me no monkey chaser. And, if I is a monkey chaser — you is the
monkey.

The other two matrices in this sequence were respectively the first and second part of *The American Woman and West Indian Man* (Brunswick 7028). As with the previous two titles, this dialogue sometimes takes on the rivalry of the 'dozens,' although the language of insult is less bawdy. Again, the West Indian man is a Jamaican, or 'country man,' and he is seen to triumph over his two-timing, scheming, high 'yellow' North American woman:

The American Woman and West Indian Man – Pt. 1

sung A.F. I got a man for spring, I got a man for summer,
A stick of wood is dumb, but brother you're dumber,
So, 'Mr. Chump,' be on your merry way,
Your merry way.
Don't stand there actin' like a doggone nut,
'Cause when you open my front door, my back door shut,
So, 'Mr. Chump,' be on your merry way,
I mean, your merry way.

spoken S.M. Look here, American woman, do you mean to tell me when I make entrance by my
front door a gentleman exits by my back door?

A.F. I didn't say it was no woman, and he didn't go up no chimney.

S.M. Well, let me tell you, while I stand here looking as dumb as a lamb, I ain't so dumb
that I can't hear a back door slam.

A.F. Well, since you're so wise and heard all of those doors slamming, why don't you do
something about it?

S.M. Don't excite yourself. I'm gwine to do somethin' about it.

A.F. Well, let me know somethin', hot papa, 'cause mama's fixin' to obliterate you from
your existence.

S.M. I am gwine buy me a razor sure, in my right hand I know she can't fail. I ain't gwine
back to Jamaica no more. I'm gwine up to that man' jail, I'm gonna fight that man a
duel, if me and you don't stay married. I'm gwine cut his throat from ear to ear, I'm
talking about your sweet man Harry.

A.F. Say now, papa. Ain't no use for you to get so hot. 'Cause you know that ain't got it.
Our mis-marriage was a mistake.
S.M. Yeah, but who made the mistake?
A.F. Well, who's squawking?
S.M. I ain't squawking. I just want you to understand our relationship from now on.
A.F. What is it gonna be?
S.M. Well! We live like strangers. You sleep by yourself and I'm gwine to be sleepin' by
my-self.
A.F. Oh-oh! Never no sleep by myself.
S.M. Well, you ain't gwine-a sleep with me no more. 'Cause it might be raining sleet and
snow, it don't make no difference.
A.F. Well, don't you worry 'bout mama, you know. I am able to take care of myself.
S.M. Yeah.
A.F. Just go out every morning and scuffle — that's your share.
S.M. Well, let me tell you somethin'. Another thing, when you walk down the street in the
future, you'll walk by yourself.
A.F. Yes, and when you make your rules, remember I ain't so old as to be on the shelf.
And another thing, I'm gonna get a divorce and alimony from you.
S.M. But you done got all my money.
A.F. I haven't got half of what I'm gonna get. From now on I'm gonna get every penny
that you can make. And if you don't give it to me, I'm gonna see the man.
S.M. See what man?
A.F. The judge man. And see that he puts you under the jail, you get me? — under the
jail!
S.M. Yea, and there'll be a whole lot of people up to your house — your mother, your
father, all your generation. There will be crashing and gnashing of teeth, and you
wouldn't know nothing 'bout it.
A.F. What do you mean?
S.M. I mean, when I come out from under the jail, I'll take my razor and cut you so low,
you'll be walking around with crutches under your ears.

The American Woman and West Indian Man – Pt. 2

sung S.M. Say now, look here, American woman,
spoken A.F. What is it now?
sung S.M. Have you understand,
You're flirting with the graveyard,
When you fool with my country man?
I loves you like I don't know what,
Gives you all my dough,
spoken A.F. Got a right to.
sung S.M. Fool with me, you sure get cut,
Then 'Sing Sung' jail I'll go.
spoken A.F. Oh, oh, hold them dice, brother, hold them dice. You going to 'Sing Sing' jail all
enough. That is if there is anything left of you when I get through with you. And you
gonna shoot somebody — heh!
S.M. That's what I said.
A.F. Ha! Well brother, if you just as much point a pistol at this pretty yellow woman, you
just as well give your heart to the Lord, because your hips are gonna belong to me.
S.M. Me hips, me hips? Woman, do you know you is talking under my clothes?
A.F. Yes, and that ain't all. I'll be standing over your cold carcass if you try to execute
any of them cruel threats.
S.M. Calm yourself, American woman, I say be-calm yourself!
A.F. Calm myself nothin'! I told you I was gonna quit and I had no right marrying you in
the first place, because you West Indian men are too treacherous.
S.M. Take that back! I said, take that back! Talking about treacherous; look at what you
done!
A.F. What did I do?

- S.M. What you didn't do! Didn't you take out a 10,000 dollars life insurance on my life,
then try to stash with me?
- A.F. You're a 'salt water' liar!
- S.M. 'Salt water' liar, the devil! Look what you done — you put starch in my biscuit trying
to poison me.
- A.F. I?
- S.M. Not 'I,' 'you!' And you know I don't like no starch in my biscuit.
- A.F. Well, how do you like your biscuit?
- S.M. I have often told you I like my biscuit rough dry.
- A.F. Ah ha! Now I have thought this matter over carefully and I think it best that we part
because your ways and manners don't ex-suit my taste.
- S.M. Mm.
- A.F. Now we are gonna part and from now on you go your way and I'll go mine.
- S.M. Yea.
- A.F. For look what you did. You haven't spoken to the pastor of our church since we got
married.
- S.M. Why should I? Why should I?
- A.F. Well, why not? The pastor hasn't offended you in any way
- S.M. Oh, go ahead woman, I knows my enemy when I sees him. That man he don't mean
me a bit of good.
- A.F. How come?
- S.M. How come? Didn't he get me tied up in marriage to you?
- A.F. Ah ha! Now I, now I know it's best that we part. For in the first place, your
vocabulary is limited. Your deportment is shocking. Why you haven't got it in any
way.
- S.M. Well, if you don't want me, I don't want you either, you big fat good-for-nothing
yellow woman.
- A.F. Oh!
- S.M. You can't dance.
- A.F. No?
- S.M. You can't sing, you can't even shook that thing.

These sketches are unique in their coverage of what was a particularly potent issue in Harlem in the 1920s. Manning's capacity to depict the immigrant, and the American responses by Anna Freeman, emphasize the process of cultural adjustment between these two segments of the black community (as well as their relationship to the white majority).

Manning Continues to Depict West Indian Cultural Adjustment

Manning was to record one more piece in this vein in 1928, the final matrix from four sides made for the Okeh 'Race' series on 3 and 4 April. Like a good proportion of his other lyrics, this was an adaptation of a West Indian folk song — in this instance *Bromley* from Barbados.⁷² Accompanied by Jack Celestain and his Caribbean Serenaders, Manning's *You Can't Get Anything out of Me* (Okeh 8567) transposes an Eastern Caribbean male boasting song into another confrontation between a migrant West Indian male and his black American girl in New York:

You Can't Get Anything out of Me

- spoken Look here, American girl, why do you keep on bothering me? Haven't I told you to
keep away. You are not going to get anything, you are not going to get nothing out of
me.
- sung (chorus) Out of me, out of me,
You wouldn't get no fur coat, out of me,
Out of me, out of me,
You wouldn't wear no diamond ring, out of me,
1. [repeat first chorus]
 2. I get up in the morning, half past eight,
Get up on the job, five minutes late,
Boss says, he don't want me no more,
The cold north winds just begin to blow.
 3. Now it ain't no joke, when I got no overcoat,

- Number playing done got me broke,
Get me rent money, tried to get quit,
Landlord come, in a hell of a fix.
4. [repeat first chorus]
- chorus Out of me, out of me,
You wouldn't get no wedding out of me,
Out of me, out of me,
You wouldn't get no wedding ring out of me.
5. Listen, Miss 'Merican girl,
You wouldn't get no apartment out of me,
Go 'way, Miss 'Merican girl,
You wouldn't get no furniture out of me.
- chorus Out of me, out of me,
You wouldn't keep no sweet man, out of me,
Out of me, out of me,
You'll never make no slavey out of me.
5. Go 'way, Miss 'Merican girl,
You wouldn't make no slavey out of me,
Go 'way, Miss 'Merican girl,
You wouldn't keep no sweet man out of me.
6. [repeat second verse]
7. Ain't no joke, got no overcoat,
Number playing done got me broke,
Took me rent money, played seven-fifty-six,
When the landlord call, I'm in a hell of a fix.

Here is a further presentation of migrant black West Indian mistrust for the black American — overlain with mistrust between the sexes. This apprehension is combined with the problems of employment dictated by the clock, fear of dismissal, poverty, and of North American ghetto life, with its 'numbers' rackets offering players a gambler's chance of changing one's lot by 'winning' (or, more generally losing) in the local policy game. Such sentiments are also found in blues of the period, although expressed far more introspectively than in this performance.⁷³

During the first eight months of 1928, advertisements for variety shows at the Alhambra and other Harlem theatres, together with reports of the same, indicate that Sam Manning kept a busy schedule of engagements in his role as a comedian and singer. This culminated in the successful staging of *Keep Scuffling* at the Lafayette at the beginning of August.⁷⁴ Excepting a recording session as featured vocalist with Jack Celestain and his Caribbean Stompers (September), Manning devoted the remainder of the year to his newly chosen field of journalism.⁷⁵

Lionel O. Licorich and the S. S. Vestris — 1928

Columbia held a curious session in December 1928, comprising two sides sung by Lionel O. Licorich, a black Barbadian. They were issued in the company's export series, with 'Jack "Sweet Willie" Celestain' on piano and 'One String Willie' on one string violin (Columbia 3360-X). *Bajan Girl* is an uptempo piece, while *I Has the Blues for Thee, Barbadoes* is a non-idiomatic, nostalgic and mournful blues-based song:

I Has the Blues for Thee, Barbadoes

1. Barbados, Barbados, I am thinkin' of you,
Barbados, Barbados, I am feelin' real blue,
I am saving my money now, so I can come back home,
I will get enough somehow, never more will I roam.
2. I have the blues for thee, Barbados,
Lord, [the moon], what shall I do,
I have the blues for thee, Barbados,
I'll weep, I'll wail the whole night through.
3. Nobody knows my worries and my woes,

Nobody knows which way the wind blows,
Every time I eat of the mangoes,
I have the blues for thee, Barbados.

An undistinguished vocalist, Licorich was Quartermaster on the ill-fated *S. S. Vestris*, which had sunk ignominiously in November, en route to Barbados and Argentina. The singer played a special part in the rescue of white travellers and appears to have been granted the opportunity to record as a result of this heroism. Unlike the several hillbilly ballads composed and recorded about the sinking,⁷⁶ the market for Licorich's West Indian pieces seems to have been very limited. His fearlessness in saving passengers and his Bajan origins, however, allowed him a short period of fame as a performer on the black vaudeville circuit.⁷⁷

Manning's West Indian Tour and Return to the Recording Studios — 1929-30

During the last four months of 1928, Sam Manning and Amy Ashwood Garvey launched the *West Indian Times* (in one source *The American Times and West Indian Review*), but this experience ended in financial failure and acrimony.⁷⁸ By mid 1929 Manning was back performing, appearing in reviews at both the Lincoln and Lafayette Theaters in April⁷⁹ before taking part in a tour of the West Indies with the black American vaudevillian Sid Perrin. Amy Ashwood Garvey staged the show, which visited Jamaica in May,⁸⁰ and went on to Panama, Trinidad, Barbados and probably other islands. The party reached Trinidad on 21 June and presented their vaudeville programme at selected island cinemas until the end of the month.⁸¹

The format was based on New York presentations, though Manning introduced newly composed songs relating to each island in which he was performing. *My West Indian Home* was announced in the *Trinidad Guardian* as 'especially written' for the visit.⁸² The shows were based on recent Harlem presentations, and Manning also contributed four essays to the *Guardian* on life in this famous black people's settlement. The content of these treatments is of special interest in the light of his repertoire.

Describing 'Deep Harlem' as a 'Mecca of "Big Bluff"' in the first of these articles Manning places the population of this black section in the context of poor wages and crowded accommodation, deducing that 'the average West Indian man and woman in New York . . . realise that they do not "belong"'. Their one desire is to get enough money to get away.' Like the Trinidad character in *Mister Joseph Strut Your Stuff*, Manning's view was that 'Everything is a great big bluff in Harlem. Everybody makes it his business to live a lie.'⁸³

The enactment of this life of fantasy is explored in Manning's further three columns, beginning with an exposition on the 'Lure of "The Numbers"' in which he describes the mechanics and effect of the game of 'policy.' Interestingly, he does not use the latter term. The struggle to pay the rent and resort to gambling to bolster income is familiar from his *You Can't Get Anything out of Me*. Betting on numbers and use of dream books to identify combinations had become commonplace. Thus he observed: 'nearly everyone in Harlem owns a dream book which interprets the meaning of their dreams in numbers. These books, of course, have come since the Numbers craze. Strange to say they have numbers so well combined that they are often correct in their interpretations.' Winners, of course, were apt to use 'the Big Bluff' to further their advancement in this money-oriented society. Yet, in his view, the effect of the Numbers racket was not all negative, with a welcome circulation of cash and wealth for lucky winners mitigating the corruption.⁸⁴

A further reflection of the means by which Harlem inhabitants maintained themselves in strained circumstances is explored in the third essay: 'Orgy of Drinks and Dances'. This discusses consequences of alcohol prohibition, with the organisation of illicit drinking houses — 'gin mills' — and use of 'Jump Steady' (home-brewed whiskey). Manning associates the latter with weekend 'house rent parties' described as dances 'where you pay a quarter at the door, and a piano player and perhaps a noisy drummer greets you with a throbbing noise like the beating of a tom-tom. The piano hammers out a rhythm that most of those present find irresistible in its sensuous appeal ... The parlor in which a dance is held is sometimes crowded with as many as thirty couples' and 'in the circumstances' of such a confined space 'the dancing is just a slow sensuous movement of the body accompanied by a sort of shuffling of the feet. In ten minutes of dancing the dancer hardly moves three feet. But the most amusing part of the show is when the Police arrive. This frequently happens and the host is then forced to pay "protection money". If he does not intend to do so, there is a rush for the bathroom to get rid of the drinks.' The collective nature of these events in supporting rent payments is identified.⁸⁵

In Manning's final treatment, the secular world of top Harlem night-clubs patronized by 'white visitors from Broadway' — the Cotton Club, Small's Paradise, and Connie's Inn — is contrasted with the

variety of old and new religious groupings flourishing within Harlem's boundaries: 'Humorous Religion.'⁸⁶

After a series of performances in Barbados during the first weeks of July 1929, the movements of the Manning-Perrin company are uncertain, but by January 1930 Manning had returned to New York where he recorded eight titles for Columbia's foreign series.⁸⁷ This was in the height of the Depression, and several of these pieces reflect the disillusionment of migrants stranded without resource in the metropolis. They may also represent newly composed repertoire from the West Indian tour. Optimistically, the lyrics to *Back to My West Indian Home* (Columbia 3940-X) recommend a return to the Caribbean as a much better alternative to the financial uncertainty of the U.S.A. This is likely *My West Indian Home*, the song he had composed in Trinidad:

Back to My West Indian Home

1. Then I'm leaving, leaving, leaving this town today,
Sailing, sailing, like a stowaway,
Empty handed, broken hearted, got no trunks to pack,
But I'm happy 'cause I'm going home and I ain't coming back,
Back to my West India home, where the coconut grow,
Back, back where I belong, never to roam no mo',
I ain't got no money, I've been broke for the longest time,
But the folks will be glad to see me, though I ain't got a dime.
2. Oh, yes, I'm going right back, midst the flowers and the bees,
Oh now, I'm hurrying back, 'neath the coconut trees,
Over there don't have to have the blues,
Don't need no overcoat, I wasn't born with shoes,
I'm just a rolling stone, going back to my West India home.
3. [repeat the last four lines of verse 1]
4. [repeat verse 2]

On 9 May, Manning registered twelve of his melodies for copyright — as 'Samuel Manning of Great Britain...domiciled in New York.'⁸⁸ This indicates Manning's status, and that of many of his contemporaries, as non-U.S. nationals, the process of naturalisation having little social advantage for British West Indian migrants in this period.⁸⁹ In June, George Tichenor published a vivid account of a Manning appearance at the Alhambra Theater, on Seventh Avenue and 126th Street in Harlem. In a skit with Ruth Trent entitled 'Mr. Squash Meets a Girl,' Tichenor notes that:

Sam Manning comes on the stage wearing a pinkish vest and white top hat. His suit is checkered gray, the trousers fitting close to his stout legs and not quite long enough. It is Sam's favorite costume and is never out-moded, whatever the act he appears in this evening. Sam is ingeniously beguiling, in the hunching way he walks and his Jamaica [*sic*] accent.

Supporting Manning on this bill were the popular black North American vaudevillians Revella Hughes and Amanda Randolph, and in the orchestra pit New York jazz musicians James 'Bubber' Miley (cornet) and Emmet Matthews (saxophone).⁹⁰

Manning and Lionel Belasco Travel to Britain — 1934

Manning made no recordings for the West Indian export market in 1931 or 1932, Trinidad being catered for principally by Wilmoth Houdini. As with the recording of blues in this period, there was little or no commercial activity during the height of the economic depression. In 1933, however, Manning cut sessions for the Perfect and Bluebird specialist lines for the English-speaking Caribbean. During the same years, changes took place in the organisation of the principal Harlem theatres.⁹¹ Thus, by the beginning of 1934, Manning parted company with the lease holder of the Harlem Opera House, where he was a featured performer,⁹² a move that coincided with a more aggressive competition policy set by the nearby Apollo Theater.⁹³ By this time, Manning's special popularity in Harlem was probably on the wane; certainly his repertoire appears to have been directed primarily towards Caribbean sales, when he made further sides for Bluebird, before setting sail for Britain with Lionel Belasco in June 1934. Nevertheless, Manning's virtually unique role in mediating traditionally-based black vocal music from the Caribbean, mixed with American jazz, to audiences in the English-speaking West Indies, North America and later Britain paved the way for future crossover performances that began to emerge during the 1930s.⁹⁴

Popular Trinidad Calypsonians Record in New York for the First Time — 1934

1934 was a watershed year in recorded music from the English-speaking Caribbean. Two leading Trinidad calypsonians — Atila the Hun (Raymond Quevedo) and the (Roaring or Metro) Lion (Hubert Raphael Charles) — journeyed to New York to make 24 sides for ARC-Brunswick (March). Subsequently, at the end of the year, the black vaudevillian Bill Rogers travelled from Guyana to the same location to record 30 performances for Bluebird. From this point, a preponderance of recordings by artists based in the Eastern Caribbean became the norm in series aimed directly at this market.

The immediate effect of Atila's and Lion's visit in the United States was the promotion of authentic calypso via radio broadcast — both states-wide and in the Caribbean, they appeared on the Fleischmann hour with the famous crooner Rudy Vallee. To acclaim, at Vallee's invitation, the two calypsonians also performed with the singer at the Hollywood restaurant and club on Broadway.⁹⁵ This varied exposure raised the status of the music — President Roosevelt became a fan — and paved the way for greater acceptability of the style. The growing interest among a general audience, however, would not be felt for several years in the dissemination of equivalent traditional U.S. black music that sold principally to regional purchasers in a segregated market.

The Ballad of *Delia* (Green) in the Bahamas — 1929

There were several ways in which secular black Caribbean music interchanged with its North American counterpart. A particularly interesting case (with respect to the Bahamas) is the African-American ballad '*Delia* (Green),' known more usually but incorrectly as '*Delia* (Holmes)' (Laws I 8).⁹⁶

In 1928, Robert W. Gordon, the first Archivist at the newly instituted Archive of (American) Folk Song at the Library of Congress, traced the origin of this ballad to Savannah, Georgia.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, other aspects of his research remain unpublished, but the event has been identified as taking place at a Christmas Eve party in 1900, when Moses 'Coony' Houston shot Delia Green.⁹⁸ The song first appeared in print as *One More Rounder Gone* in 1911, obtained between 1906 and 1908 in Newton County, Georgia, by Howard W. Odum.⁹⁹ Another folk song collector, Newman Ivey White, printed three variants in his *American Negro Folk Songs* (1928), obtained between 1915 and 1924 in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina respectively.¹⁰⁰ Chapman J. Milling printed three more versions in 1937.¹⁰¹ Zora Neale Hurston also collected the ballad in Florida¹⁰² and several south-eastern U.S. field recordings are documented — such as that recorded by Blind Willie McTell in Atlanta for the Library of Congress in 1940 — as well as Jimmy Gordon's *Delhia* (Decca 7592), recorded in 1939.

Less well known are the versions from the Bahamas. Amelia Defries printed the earliest in 1929, in a book on the islands:

Rubber tyred buggy, double seated hack,
Carry poor Delia to de graveyard and never bring her back,
Delia gone, Delia gone.¹⁰³

There are also two Bahamian pre-war field recordings of this piece held by the Library of Congress, and several post Second World War commercial recordings.¹⁰⁴ Further examples of similar black North American proto blues appearing in English-speaking Caribbean repertoire include "Nobody's Business," which was recorded commercially in Jamaica (and West Africa) after the Second World War.¹⁰⁵

Recorded Bahamian Repertoire and the U.S.A. — 1920s-30s

Inevitably, there was movement of songs in the other direction. A useful example of the adoption and adaptation of West Indian repertoire is the Bahamian song *Mama Don't Want No Peas and Rice*, as a formal arrangement has become known. This bears some resemblance to the black American barrelhouse piece *Mama Don't 'Low*, adapted for the mayoral campaign of 'Boss Crump' in Memphis, Tennessee in 1909 and recorded by several bluesmen.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps a Caribbean reworking of the earlier composition, *Mama Don't Want No Peas and Rice* is best remembered in jazz circles for recordings by white bandleader Mart Britt and his Orchestra (Victor 22933 / Bluebird B 4955, recorded 1932) and Cleo Brown (Decca 512, recorded 1935). Most familiar is the 'blues' rendition by Jimmy Rushing with the Count Basie Orchestra (Decca 2030, recorded in New York City on 6 June 1938).¹⁰⁷ The Bahamian lyric probably originated during the First World War. At least, this was the view of Van Campen Heilner, who collected a version entitled *Coconut Oil* (A Song of the Bahama Islands) in about 1924:

My mammy don't want no peas, no rice, no coconut oil! (3x)

All she wants a brandy shandy after nine!

During the war the natives of the Bahamas found it extremely difficult to get butter, lard or fat of any kind and the majority of cooking was done in coconut oil. They soon got sick of it and the saying 'My mammy don't want no peas and rice with coconut oil' gave rise to the song. A 'brandy shandy' can be either a drink or a 'hot time'.¹⁰⁸

His variant was published in 1930 but, with the substitution of 'Papa' for 'Mammy' and other minor differences, had been printed a year earlier by Amelia Defries:

Papa don't want no peas nor rice nor coconut oil, (2x)
All he wants is sugar brandy [*sic*] all the time.¹⁰⁹

The 'composed' rendition (as sung by Rushing), was not registered for copyright until 1931 — in the names of L. Wolfe Gilbert (words), L. Charles and J. Rosamond Johnson (melody).¹¹⁰

Working in Florida during the 1930s, the celebrated black American folklorist Zora Neale Hurston recorded a version of this song for the Library of Congress. She attributes its origin to Nassau, New Providence Island in the Bahamas, describing it as a husband's explanation 'to the neighbors what is the matter with his wife and why they don't get along better.'¹¹¹

Decca Experiment with West Indian Styles in their U.S. 'Race' Series — 1938-39

By the late 1930s, popular success of Trinidad calypso recordings in the United States was manifest.¹¹² The trend was spearheaded by the canny judgements of Jack Kapp who had cultivated the line since he broke from ARC-Brunswick and launched U.S. Decca (with Edward Lewis of British Decca) in August 1934. Encouraged by sales to U.S. tourists in Trinidad, Kapp inaugurated availability of the Decca calypso series in any U.S. record store in August 1938.¹¹³ He was a master at superimposition of dissimilar musical styles via the gramophone record and, having produced Sam Manning and Wilmoth Houdini for Brunswick, was well aware of the crossover potential in marketing West Indian idioms to different audiences. In September 1938, therefore, he authorized an offbeat session by Jack Sneed and his Sneezers, which paired a quasi West Indian vocalist with high-class black American musicians in accompaniment (Joe Guy—trumpet, John Kirby—string bass, O' Neil Spencer—drums, unknown—piano, unknown—guitar). The 'West Indian' repertoire incorporated a very anti Garvey version of *West Indies Blues*, and a semi-bawdy Jamaican rendering of *Sly Mongoose* (Decca 7566). Its 'North American' session mates comprised *The Numbers Man* (a policy theme), and *Big Joe Louis*, a panegyric for the famous boxer (Decca 7522). The playing of policy and Joe Louis's career as a champion fighter were the subjects of contemporary blues,¹¹⁴ and Joe Louis's exploits also featured in several Trinidad calypsos.¹¹⁵ Notwithstanding, Sneed's presentation is difficult to interpret. He accentuates mannerisms that might be Jamaican in origin virtually to the point of parody, but in a black North American context. This suggests a familiarity with New York cabaret. The authenticity of his lyrics to *Sly Mongoose*, however, suggests knowledge of Jamaican traditions, and may indicate he was a black New Yorker of West Indian parentage.¹¹⁶

Decca recorded Sneed for a second time in May 1939. Unlike the first session — issued in the company's 'Race' series — one coupling was selected for the popular line: *Jamaica Mama / Sissy in the Barn* (Decca 2529). As the title suggests, the former is a 'West Indian' theme in which the 'mama' is both 'mighty sweet' and 'mighty mean':

Jamaica Mama

sung Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama,
Mighty sweet to me.
Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama,
Sweet as she can be.

1. Jamaica mama, she cook cou-cou,
Jamaica mama, cook calalu,
Jamaica mama, cook fungee too,
Oh, Jamaica mama.
Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama,
Mighty sweet to me.

spoken Ah, toot it
Yes, yes now
Oh, baby — oh baby
Hi-hi-hi-hi

Ah, toot it
Hi-hi-hi

sung Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama,
Mighty mean to me.
Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama,
Mean as she can be.

2. Jamaica mama, she big and stout,
She get mad and poke out she mouth,
She man come home, and he throw me out,
Oh, Jamaica mama.
Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama, Jamaica mama,
Mighty mean to me.

The second title is both a children's game song and a bawdy rhyme, known otherwise as *Sissy and Bob*, that was described in the 1940s as an ancient 'Virginia reel' by 'One Leg Shadow' — Walter Gould, an elderly ragtime pianist.¹¹⁷ The other two sides (Decca 7621) are also cleaned up versions of bawdy songs: *Paul Revere* and *Ole Chris (Christafo Colombo)*.¹¹⁸ The same backing group accompanied. These are just as enigmatic as the earlier performances by Sneed, and a later group made on 22 August, which might provide further clues to his antecedents, remains unissued. This comprises interpretations of three Trinidad calypsos from Decca's West Indian series, plus *Lyonaise*, *Potatoes and Porkchops*.¹¹⁹

'Calypso Jazz' — A Precursor of 'Jive'?

While the session was never released, it confirms Decca's interest in exploring the market for West Indian repertoire in 'jive' tempo. Further evidence comes from an earlier recording date, on 5 July, by Harold Boyce and his Harlem Indians. Six sides were made, and Arthur Herbert, the drummer at the session considered them to be 'played in West Indian Calypso Jazz style' and that they were 'ten years ahead of their time'.¹²⁰ Four are relevant to this assessment. Decca 7636 consists of a variant of Sam Manning's *Sweet Willie* — entitled *Willie, Willie Don't Go From Me* — and *De Bush to Biol [sic] Tea*:

De Bush to Biol [sic] Tea

1. Oh, buy me, for I know the bush to boil tea, (x2)
The [seal] on the leaf is one,
The [tentan] bush is two,
The Minnie root bark is three,
And that will fix the baby.
2. Oh, buy me, for I know the bush to boil tea, (x2)
The Minnie root bush is four,
The yellow hawk seed is five,
The Christmas bush is six
And everything that will fix.
3. Oh, buy me, for I know the bush to boil tea, (x2)
The [seal] on the leaf,
The leaf on the [seal],
The [tentan] bush,
The Gully root bark,
The mahogany seed,
The peach tree root,
And that's the bush to boil tea.
4. [repeat verse 3, excluding the first line]

From these words, the meaning of the theme is obscure, excepting that it appears to be the cry of a street seller of herbs (bushes) used for various remedies (teas). Light is thrown on the full implication of this piece, however, via the repertoire of a blind Caribbean 'ballad-monger' named Charles 'Johnny' Waters who lived on Nevis. The performer died in 1959, but while working in the island during the early 1960s, Roger D. Abrahams recovered a proportion of his songs from 'a chapbook assembled and sold by Waters'. One item gives 'a recipe for tea to induce abortion' and, as Abrahams notes, the constituents 'are names of bushes, except for the addition of ingredients like *crapaud* (frog) gills'. The lyrics are related directly to Harold Boyce's recording:

The Bush to Kill the Baby

1. Ahoy, come to me, come to me,
Let me teach you bush to boil tea,
Ahoy, come to me, come to me,
The bush to kill the baby.
- chorus White pine board, mhalodo bush,
Congolala, and the black-sage,
Mahogany bark, cattle tongue leaf,
The bush to kill the baby.
2. Old lady body, pumpkin belly,
Mosquito wing, crapow gill,
Blue fly belly, policeman shoes,
The bush to kill the baby.
3. When she picks up that mixture,
Then she goes to the dance,
Soon she give two little spin 'round,
They sing out she mischance.¹²¹

The other pertinent Boyce coupling encompasses a version of the Jamaican work song *De Donkey Want Water*, and a lament *Bajun Gal* (Decca 7748):

Bajun Gal

1. Bajun gal, she gone and left me alone,
Bajun gal, I wish that she would come home,
Boy, she could stir up the cou-cou,
Oh, how I miss the cou-cou,
Want you know, one and all,
I like my Bajun gal.
2. Bajun gal, she travel all 'round the world,
Bajun gal, the sweetest gal in the world,
Boy, she could [fly] up the flying fish,
Oh, how I miss the flying fish,
Want you all, one and all,
I like my Bajun gal.
3. Bajun gal, I just can't do without her,
Bajun gal, I keep on thinkin' 'bout her,
Boy, she could cook up the dumplings,
Oh, how I miss me dumplings,
I want you know, one and all,
I like my Bajun gal.
I like my Bajun gal.

The final two sides have no direct West Indian relationship: *Knock Ya' Self Out / So What* (Decca 7696).

Herbert's description of these performances as 'Calypso Jazz' is accurate. In contrast to Jack Sneed, the vocals have none of the patronising affectations associated with his presentations. They are, therefore, particularly important precursors of the 'Calypso-Rhythm & Blues' or 'Jive' style adopted by Louis Jordan after the Second World War.

The Roles of Gerald Clark and Gregory Felix in New York

There were further factors that supplemented Decca's cultivation of calypso for a wider audience. One was the Trinidad-born bandleader Gerald Clark (Fitzgerald Clarke). If not before, from 1927 — when he played guitar on Wilmoth Houdini's first session, for Victor — Clark was involved in a good proportion of the calypso sides recorded in America. Jack Kapp used his band to accompany Atila the Hun and the Roaring Lion in 1934 and this unit became the house musicians for Decca when they recorded Trinidad calypsos in New York. There was a lull in Clark's Decca recording activities between 1938 and 1940, when the company sent their production team annually to Trinidad for calypso sides. Together with another colleague, Gregory Felix (who was also a bandleader), Clark sought to expand the interest in Trinidad music in the United States by staging events and extra recording

dates.¹²² Felix, a clarinet player, had worked in the band of James Reese Europe before the latter's unfortunate death in 1919, and had possibly been with King Oliver *circa* 1931. Almost certainly, he was Gregory Felix Delgado, one of the Puerto Rican musicians Reese Europe recruited for his U.S. Army 369th Infantry Band, and took to France at the end of the First World War.¹²³

Decca employed Felix and his Krazy Kats, who often accompanied Wilmoth Houdini on his sides, for an unusual set of recordings on 21 February 1938. These were popular songs performed by the band in paseo (or calypso) tempo. Interesting for their lack of jazz influence, the six pieces reversed Jack Kapp's general practice for his calypso sequence — usually different performers were represented on either side of a release. The Krazy Kats, however, were coupled in three 78s for the series and, separately, two were paired in the company's popular line: *Josephine* and *The Dipsy Doodle* (Decca 1856). The singer was Cecil Anderson, a Trinidadian who was to make a career in the United States under the sobriquet Duke of Iron.¹²⁴ Anderson was not a true calypsonian, never having achieved status in Trinidad calypso tents, but his diction was clear, and this made him a suitable vocalist for North American audiences as well as migrant West Indians.

By August 1939, Gerald Clark had secured a position for his Calypso Serenaders at the Village Vanguard in Greenwich Village, New York, and virtually remained in residence for a year. He used the Duke of Iron as narrator and vocalist for this cabaret. At the end of 1939 the group cut four sides for Varsity. This was followed in January 1940 with another four titles for the same company in which two more of Clark's vocalists performed: Sir Lancelot (Lancelot Pinard — a trained singer of lieder from Trinidad) and Macbeth the Great (Patrick McDonald).¹²⁵ In April, *Life* magazine printed a story on this movement towards attracting a larger audience, with photographs that showed the Duke of Iron accompanied by Gregory Felix on clarinet and characters in masquerade costumes, taken at Shrovetide celebrations in New York.¹²⁶

The closest parallels in jazz and blues at this time were the two *Spirituals to Swing* concerts at Carnegie Hall sponsored by John Hammond in 1938 and 1939 respectively. They form part of a process that was leading to greater acceptability of black culture among white people in the United States. Since the networked broadcasts by Atilla and Lion in 1934, calypsonians had been in the vanguard of this trend and Trinidadians missed no opportunity that presented itself to promote their island's music.

Bill Gaither's *Big Time Town Woman* — 1939

References to West Indians are very scarce in blues recorded by black North Americans. An exception is Bill Gaither's *Big Time Town Woman* (Decca 7760, made in New York City on 29 June 1939). Here, as the first two verses explain, one of three 'big time town' women with whom he is intimate is a 'thorough-bread West Indie' living in New York City:

1. I once had three women, each lived in a big time town,
I once had three women, each lived in a big time town,
New York, Detroit, and Chicago,
They kept me travelling the whole year round.
2. The girl in New York, she was a thorough-breaded West Indie,
The girl in New York, was a thorough-bread West Indie,
She had a way of loving,
That would nearly take my breath away.

By the end of the song, however, Gaither is asking 'Somebody tell me what [love] is all about' — indicating that none of the affairs has produced a lasting relationship. His West Indian girlfriend, nevertheless, has positive attributes, in contrast to the negative stereotypes of 1920s pieces. This points to a greater degree of cultural understanding and, obliquely, may reflect a wider acceptance of people from the Caribbean then prevalent in the U.S.A.

Wilmoth Houdini's First 78 rpm Calypso Album — 1939

While the majority of Jack Sneed's recordings and all of those by Harold Boyce were issued in the Decca 'Race' series, the company was also intent on expanding its calypso line with more general purchasers. With this in mind, on 11 September 1939 it recorded the first of three 78 rpm albums devoted to the genre. This three record set was performed by Wilmoth Houdini, the Trinidad calypsonian domiciled in New York since the late 1920s, accompanied by his 'Royal Calypso Orchestra.' The package was aimed at a growing white audience for the style, with notes containing a puff for the music and its enthusiasts, plus a short history of 'Calypso' by Atilla the Hun and lyric transcripts of all six songs. On 9 October, *Newsweek* ran an article on calypso and the imminent distribution of the album, further indicating Decca's public relations endeavor to popularize the music

among affluent white purchasers. Several of the compositions had the theme of the recent visit to the U.S.A. by the British monarch and his consort. Album no. 78 (Decca 18005-18007) was released ten days later.¹²⁷

He Had It Coming — An Adaptation of Murder in the Market

One song — *He Had It Coming* — was to be of particular significance when it was re-recorded after the Second World War. It is based on a Barbadian folk song usually known as *Murder in the Market* or *Payne Dead*. According to Atila, the song reached Trinidad in the early 1910s.¹²⁸ The anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits obtained a short version on 15 July 1939, while he was conducting field work in Toco, Trinidad, which was recorded by Louisa Neptune, accompanied by three other women.¹²⁹ The fullest text that has been traced, however, was collected in the Panama Canal Zone during the Second World War, from an old Barbadian woman who recalled it from her youth in the island:

Murder in de Market

1. Murder in de market murder! (x3)
Hide me, oh Miss Clark, do hide me.
2. Put me under de bed an yo hide me.
Hide me, oh Miss Clark, do hide me. (x3)
3. Betsy tell me what you do before I hide you. (x2)
I went to the market to get beef,
Payne call me a liar an' I stab 'im.
4. Payne dead, Payne dead, Payne dead. (x3)
An' I wish Grand Session was tomorra.
5. I would answer de judge like a lion, (x3)
For I ain't killed nobody but me husband.
6. Didn't mean to kill him but him stone dead. (x3)
Payne call me a liar an' I stab 'im. (x2)¹³⁰

Other Decca 78 rpm 'Calypso' Albums — 1940-42

Just over a year after recording their first calypso album, Decca cut six specially prepared sides for a further presentation by Wilmoth Houdini. This was released in a three record set early in 1941 — *Harlem Seen through Calypso Eyes* (Album no. 198). A third collection followed in the first months of 1942, comprising five 78 rpm records made by visiting Trinidad calypsonians the previous April — *Calypso* (Album no. 256). Accompaniment was by Gerald Clark's Orchestra. Finally, Felix And His Krazy Kats performed the same function for Sam Manning's four record album *West Indian Folk Songs*, cut in December 1941. This was released in May 1942 (Album no. 308), by which time the United States was fully engaged in fighting the Second World War.

The advent of full-scale war interrupted the slow build-up in general interest in music from the English-speaking West Indies being cultivated by Decca. This appears to be true also for recordings aimed at a specifically black audience. (The orientation of a session by Boyce's Harlem Serenaders for Decca in October 1941 was in proto-rhythm and blues tempo and, in parallel with the company's second Wilmoth Houdini album, the lyrics focussed on Harlem night life.) In any event, the ban on recording by the American Federation of Musicians in the summer of 1942, plus wartime rationing of shellac, brought Decca's carefully laid plans to a snail's pace.

Another reflection of the growing interest in Trinidad music, however, was the preparation of a book of calypsos with musical notation by Massie Patterson and Lionel Belasco, which commenced in 1941. In the same year, Belasco toured California and Oregon as pianist with Sir Lancelot and the singer's motion picture career started as a result of contacts made at this time. Similarly, in New York, the Duke of Iron, and Gerald Clark and his orchestra, began performing regularly for radio broadcasts.¹³¹

Louis Jordan's Adoption of Calypso Repertoire

During the same period Decca were experimenting with recordings by Jack Sneed and Harold Boyce performing West Indian repertoire, and Felix and his Krazy Kats playing popular American tunes in paseo tempo, they also began speculating with novelty rhythm and blues. Their prime performer was Louis Jordan, whose first coupling under his own name was cut in December 1938 (Decca 7556). This comprised a version of a black American children's game song *Honey in the Bee Ball* (otherwise

known as *All Hid*) backed by *Barnacle Bill the Sailor* (a cleaned up version of a bawdy song, like three of the items recorded by Jack Sneed in May 1939). Jordan's genial blues and dead pan vocals were to gain in popularity in the market for 'Race' records until the start of the 1942 recording ban. At some point, Jordan became interested in the calypsos being performed by Trinidadians in the United States. His earliest known association with the genre is an AFRS Jubilee broadcast made for the American Forces *circa* August 1943, in which his band accompanied the Duke of Iron singing *Marry a Woman Uglier than You* — (better known as *Ugly Woman*, this Roaring Lion speciality had been recorded first by the calypsonian for ARC in 1934 as *Marry an Ugly Woman*: Perfect P-735 &c.)

The U.S.A. and World War II in Trinidad

President Roosevelt signed the Lend Lease agreement with the British in September 1940. One consequence was that U.S. forces began to set up bases in Trinidad during 1941. Similar establishments were situated at several other locations in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, St. Lucia and Guyana on the South American mainland. By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on 7 December of the same year, U.S. military personnel were firmly entrenched in Trinidad. Bing Crosby had visited the island on 15 October, and several U.S. stars touring in a flying showboat played a date for the troops on 8 November.¹³² This pattern of visits by famous U.S. performers to entertain American forces continued throughout the war, following Roosevelt's declaration of hostilities in the wake of the Pearl Harbor debacle.

Calypso singers found ready employment entertaining the American troops, as did Trinidad dance bands. Calypso tents were sanctioned during Shrovetide although, between 1942 and 1945 inclusively, no local Carnival parades were allowed by the island's administration. The full story of Lord Invader's calypso *Rum and Coca-Cola* has been detailed elsewhere. Suffice it to say that it was sung in calypso tents in 1943 and, later in the year, learnt by Morey Amsterdam, a U.S. comedian on a tour entertaining his country's armed personnel. Amsterdam took the song back to New York, made adjustments to the lyrics, and in 1944 introduced the calypso to the city's night spots via the singer Jeri Sullivan. By this time Decca had signed with the American Federation of Musicians and once more were fully engaged in up-to-date recording.

The Popularity of *Rum and Coca-Cola* — 1945

For Jack Kapp, in his endeavor to broaden the appeal of calypso, *Rum and Coca-Cola* was the most suitable crossover song he could ever wish for. Its heady subject was the entanglement of American and Caribbean values brought about by the war. Here were GIs and Trinidad women flirting on the beach, drinking a cocktail of one of America's favorite beverages mixed with West Indian rum, in a tropical paradise. This could not fail in the hands of the highly successful threesome, the Andrews Sisters. Recorded in October 1944, released in December, their rendering became an enormous hit (Decca 18636).

The profound effect of *Rum and Coca-Cola* on the popularity of Trinidad music in the United States is most obvious in the ensuing litigation over both the words and melody. This was big business and big money. There were also new opportunities for island calypsonians with reputations in America. Lord Invader (Rupert Grant) was the first to travel to New York, followed shortly afterwards by Atila the Hun and the Lion. The legal challenge to Morey Amsterdam was foremost in their objectives, but personal appearances and recording dates were also on the agenda. Each made records for Guild / Musicraft and Invader cut further sides for Decca. Other Trinidad singers known from their earlier recordings (Lord Beginner, King Radio, the Growling Tiger) took similar advantage of the new circumstances, as did Trinidad performers living in the United States.¹³³

New York-based blues musicians also reacted to *Rum and Coca-Cola* in their repertoire. Champion Jack Dupree, a New Orleans pianist living in Harlem, recorded his *Rum Cola Blues* in May 1945 (Joe Davis 5100), and Brownie McGhee, the guitarist from Tennessee, cut *Rum Cola Papa* the next year (Alert 400). Interestingly, Sam Manning had been instrumental in arranging McGhee's first session in New York following the recording ban, with Savoy Records in December 1944. Another migrant musician, blues pianist Wilbert 'Big Chief' Ellis from Alabama, managed a New York bar for 12 years which was owned by Manning's Jamaican business partner, the pianist Adolph Thenstead.¹³⁴

Stone Cold Dead in the Market—A Follow Up To *Rum and Coca-Cola* — 1946

Intent on making the maximum of his success with the Andrews Sisters' hit, Jack Kapp took careful stock before his next foray in this particular market. Judging by his action, he endeavored to increase popularity of the genre by making a record that would appeal to both black and white audiences,

especially those intent on up-to-date sounds. In consequence, he teamed Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Jordan, two of his well-known black artists, in a version of *He Had It Coming* — retitled for the occasion: *Stone Cold Dead in the Market*. This rendition was cut on 8 October 1945, and Houdini registered *He Had It Coming* for copyright on 7 November (there had been no formalities in 1939, when he first recorded the song). The Fitzgerald-Jordan performance was released by Decca in May of the following year and was another huge success (Decca 23546) at which point, using the new title, Houdini re-registered copyright.¹³⁵

In the light of its hit status, the song was soon covered by Betti Mays and her Orchestra, led by Paul Bascomb, with the Duke of Iron performing the duet (Alert 203). Houdini gained accolades in the next year or so by advertising himself as the composer wherever he appeared. Such was the vogue for this piece that Fred Robbins, on behalf of the *Trinidad Guardian*, presented a silver trophy to Fitzgerald and Jordan for their endeavors in popularising West Indian music. This event was held in New York on 2 February 1947, at an 'Afro-West Indian Shango Carnival and Dance' in which Houdini, Lord Invader, the Duke of Iron and Sir Lancelot also took part.¹³⁶

Lord Invader in New York — 1945-48

Unlike the other Trinidad calypsonians who travelled to New York in 1945, Lord Invader remained domiciled in the city for over three years, performing and recording with local musicians. He cut a number of sides for Moses Asch's Disc label, several of which were drawn from the repertoire of other calypsonians in Trinidad. One was *God Made Us All*, first performed in Trinidad during the calypso season of 1943 by Lord Pretender (Alric Farrell), who is credited with its composition.¹³⁷ Invader performed his version at a hootenanny in New York on 9 May 1946,¹³⁸ and this version was printed in *People's Songs* in July 1946.¹³⁹ Following the acquittal in November 1946 of Linwood Shull (Chief of Police in Batesburg, South Carolina) for beating black war veteran Isaac Woodard and gouging out his eyes, Invader added a verse to cover the incident. The later version is remembered from a calypso concert staged by Alan Lomax at New York Town Hall in December of the same year.¹⁴⁰ Invader recorded the song for Disc in 1947 (5080)¹⁴¹ and in turn the words were adopted by the famous black American songster Huddie Leadbetter (Lead Belly), another Asch protégé. Lead Belly's version went under the names of *Nobody in the World Is Better than Us*, or *Equality For Negroes*, and entered his recorded repertoire in 1948.¹⁴² The songster's adaptation of this theme demonstrates yet another aspect of the process by which black music from the English-speaking West Indies and North America interacted during the immediate post war period. From his arrival in 1945, Invader was engaged in the court battle over the infringement of his lyrics to *Rum and Coca-Cola*. This was won in February 1947, and upheld on appeal at the end of the year. Invader was back in Trinidad by Shrovetide 1949, but the damages were not paid until 1955!¹⁴³ The general American interest in calypso and Trinidad performers was sustained throughout 1947 with at least two special shows staged at Carnegie Hall and further recordings. Undoubtedly, this was one factor that led both Jack Kapp and Louis Jordan to consider more material for the singer-saxophonist's successful stream of recordings for Decca. Jordan also developed an affinity for the genre.

Walter Merrick, Joe Willoughby, Louis Jordan and *Run Joe* — 1948

Possibly as a result of Lord Invader's litigation against the publishers of *Rum and Coca-Cola*, or the parallel case brought by Lionel Belasco, who contested the melody, Decca officials were reminded of the calypso 'composing' abilities of Walter Merrick. In any event, a song prepared by Merrick and one of his 'boyhood pal[s] . . . from Trinidad' (Joe Willoughby) was selected for Jordan's next calypso recording in Rhythm & Blues tempo. This was *Run Joe*, cut in New York on 23 April 1947 and released in 1948 (Decca 24448). Like *Stone Cold Dead in the Market*, the piece was almost certainly an interpretation of an old Caribbean song. The clue is an unissued piano solo by Merrick, cut for Victor on 19 May 1921: *Come Quick, the Man at the Door* – Grenada Paseo.¹⁴⁴

Merrick and Willoby [*sic*] had registered an unpublished version of *Run Joe, de Man At The Door* for copyright on 18 April, just under a week before Jordan recorded the piece: all three registered a revised version of the words and melody (simply called *Run Joe*) on 15 May. The song's title encompasses a masquerade which many U.S. citizens may not have realised, for in Trinidad during the war 'Joe' became parlance for an American male on the 'make'!

Historical evidence shows the story 'Louis Jordan Visits Doc: Leaves With Hit Tune' is apocryphal.¹⁴⁵ This was published soon after the release of *Run Joe* and maintained:

when band leader Louis Jordan visited Dr. Walter Merrick last summer for a physical check-up, little did he realise he would walk out of the medic's office with a batch of calypso tunes

and that *Run Joe* had been 'waxed just before the recording ban last year' [commencing 31 December 1947].

It is possible Merrick had a private practice, but when he appeared as an expert witness for Lionel Belasco (1948), he was head director of the department of physical medicine and assisting visiting neuro-psychiatrist at Harlem Hospital.¹⁴⁶ The romantic ring of the *Defender's* story was probably record promotion hyperbole!

The Merrick-Willoughby-Jordan partnership continued after the recording strike ended in December 1948. In April 1949, Louis cut *Push Ka Pee Shee Pie (The Saga of Saga Boy)* which had been written by all three (Decca 24877). A Trinidad 'saga boy' is synonymous with zoot-suited swaggers of the 1940s in the U.S.A., and part of the same war-time phenomenon. There were other Willoughby-Jordan collaborations, notably *You Will Always Have a Friend* (Decca 27620) recorded almost two years later, on 1 March 1951, just before Louis and his band set out for their tour of the West Indies.

Louis Jordan Tours the West Indies — 1951

This trip took Jordan and his group to Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana in the English-speaking Caribbean, and his trumpet player Aaron Izenhall recalled they also played in Haiti.¹⁴⁷ The tour 'was a huge financial success and further stimulated Jordan's interest in West Indian music.' While in Trinidad, Louis collected calypsos on his portable wire recorder, and was 'captivated' by King Radio's *Brown Skin Girl* (which tells of a Trinidad woman being left with children by a demobbed U.S. service man). Sometime after his return to the United States, Jordan told the *New York Amsterdam News* that he believed calypso would be very big in America, but for the pronunciation of the singers. He endeavored 'to make calypso understandable to Americans and yet preserve that West Indian flavour that makes it so unique'.¹⁴⁸

Calypso in the U.S.A. during the 1950s

Jordan's objective was shared by others in the U.S. music business who were involved in recording calypso and other forms of West Indian music during the 1950s, either for export, New York sales, or widespread American consumption. The latter culminated in the late 1950s with the attempt to subvert the popularity of rock 'n' roll by introducing West Indian songs, epitomized in the sanitized repertoire of Harry Belafonte.

These developments do not concern this discussion. More pertinent is Dinah Washington's recording of Walter Merrick's *Since My Man Has Gone and Went* (Mercury 70284, recorded *circa* July 1953), or Louis Jordan's support for the genre, which continued into the decade. Of the Trinidadians who gained popularity in the U.S. in the late 1930s, the Duke of Iron had a significant recording career throughout the 1950s, and Sir Lancelot made several films.

Patterns of Cultural Interaction

There were differing developments in Trinidad and Jamaica that parallel and intertwine with the British and U.S. music establishments across the 1950s. These can be seen as part of a long-standing pattern that began with the coercion of slaves to work plantations in the Americas. The same general trends in the development of black music in the United States are observable in the Caribbean. In addition, it is evident that particular characteristics relate to unique aspects of colonial heritage. A case in point might be the discernible style of playing the clarinet (apparent in representative commercial recordings from the 1920s-1930s) in locations that came under French cultural influence — Martinique, Trinidad, New Orleans. Interchange in the words to children's game songs crosses the boundaries of many English-speaking territories in the Americas.¹⁴⁹ The adoption and adaptation by black people of certain English ballads in the U.S.A. is true also for Jamaica (and other islands),¹⁵⁰ but like the United States, in the Caribbean, the composition of new creole ballads and other novel song forms is the norm. Some evidence suggests that, during the mid-1890s, African-American contract workers from Virginia originated *John Henry* — the most famous of all black North American ballads — in Jamaica.¹⁵¹ The most recent research, however, implies that the ballad probably originated in Alabama in the late 1880s.¹⁵² How the evidence for the existence of the ballad in Jamaica came to be uncovered and its implications remain open questions notwithstanding. This is yet another strand in the complex relationship between black culture in the Caribbean, Africa, the Americas and Europe.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in British controlled areas, black soldiers in the British West India Regiment, which had its headquarters in Jamaica, augmented the circulation of local songs. (The pattern of membership for this military unit included Africans who were posted in the British Caribbean, and African-Caribbeans who served in British Africa.)

From colonisation, the culture of each of the Caribbean islands was influenced by a flow of theatrical presentations, circuses, and other forms of entertainment originating both in Europe and the Americas. The latter were analogous to and sometimes the same as touring organisations that traversed the Southern United States in both centuries. The absorption and modification of particular European musical styles and instruments are a further parallel with the U.S.A., as are common forms of music — work songs, topical songs, Christian religious repertoire (allied to particular denominations), etc. Yet all of these trends were subject to geographical variation and local circumstances: for example, the African-American religious practices of Shango in Trinidad (of Yoruba origin), and Kumina in Jamaica (of Congo origin).

With the influx of black migrants from the English-speaking Caribbean to the United States, from the turn of the century, it was inevitable that island-based music would form a component of the burgeoning U.S. record business. This commenced with recordings by Lovey's Trinidad String Band in New York in 1912, but was interrupted by the First World War. Migration to the Eastern seaboard of America, however, did not cease during the War and the population domiciled there and in English-speaking Caribbean islands proved a ready market for recordings of indigenous music. There was opportunity also for the direct interchange between black West Indian and black American music that is the subject of this treatment. It is apparent this was not a one-way process and that the development of black musical styles in the English-speaking West Indies is as complex as equivalent traditions in North America. Knowledge of each informs the other and allows greater perception of their significance as strands of American music in the twentieth century. More can be written, but enough has been stated to introduce another important facet of black American musical values that remains in the shadow of contemporary understanding.

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